SPUNK-LEADER of the DOG TEAM

ARTHUR C. BARTLETT

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Spunk, Leader of the Dog Team

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SPUNK,
LEADER OF THE DOG TEAM

Being the story of a dog who won his place at the head of the dog team and a hermit's son who might never have been what he became, had it not been for "Spunk"

BY
ARTHUR C. BARTLETT

ILLUSTRATED BY
P. L. MARTIN

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SPUNK, LEADER OF THE DOG TEAM

MADE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

It is only in recent years that the sled dog, sturdy hero of the frozen trails of the North Country, has made his appearance to any extent below the Canadian border. He does so now to help satisfy the American love for clean, bracing, thrilling sport. New England, as well as Canada, now has its sled dog races each winter, to the delight of an ever-increasing number of lovers of dogs and lovers of winter sports.

But there is more than sport in the sled dog. Those who have read the stories of his deeds in the Northland must realize this —and those stories, no matter how excellent they may be, can only begin to suggest the heroism, romance and inspiration that is in him. His is the very spirit of the North. He takes that spirit with him wherever he goes.

I have here tried to show him in his newest environment, New England. Yet it is impossible to divorce him entirely from

his Northland background, and several of the characters in the story have had to be imported from above the border, as they are in actuality each winter. These are his disciples, who know him of old. But the main thread of the narrative is spun around his experiences with characters unfamiliar with him—one in particular.

I will be well satisfied if the reader gets from this tale a slight fraction of the enjoyment I have had in watching such stout-hearted fellows as Spunk and his teammates in action.

Arthur C. Bartlett

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Spunk, Leader of the Dog Team

CHAPTER I

THE HERMIT'S SON

THE little village square was crowded with people. They had come from all the countryside around to see the finish of the great New England sled-dog derby. They had come afoot, on snowshoes, in sleighs, in big hayracks equipped with runners and in automobiles similarly equipped and called snowmobiles.

They formed two long lines along the main street, and special town constables were having a great deal of trouble to hold them behind the ropes which marked the course for the dog teams. They craned their necks to look up the road where soon would appear the first team of sled dogs, finishing the long three-day trek over the snow-clad hills.

At the finish line, where the judges,

watches in hand, were waiting to compute the time of the teams as they came in, was a big blackboard bearing the names of all the dog drivers in the race and the hours when they passed through the various villages along the day's route. The specially-connected telephone beside the blackboard rang every few minutes, and after a quick conference with the man who was operating it, the announcer would mount the platform and bellow through his megaphone that such and such a driver had passed through such and such a town at such and such a time. There would follow a ripple of comment through the crowd, as the man at the blackboard chalked this information down. Now and then good news would be reported from some particularly popular driver, and the ripple of comment would become a wave of cheers.

In short, the town of East Bryantsville was very much excited. Once a year it was rewarded for undergoing the long winters and heavy snows of northern New England by being treated to a sled-dog race—something which those who bask in the gentler climates may only read about. And now this

year's race was about to reach its climax. Ten or a dozen drivers of international reputation were approaching the finish line with their sturdy teams of mix-breeds. In another hour or two the year's champion would be known; the crowd would be gathering around to shake his hand and look at his team; small boys would be stealing up close and giving the victorious dogs a few furtive pats; a new hero would be enthroned.

But all this meant nothing to the Hermit's son. He had been to the village, but it was to buy supplies, not to see the finish of a dog race. When he had seen that great crowd of people gathered there, talking, laughing, pushing, he had abandoned his errand and turned back—back toward his cabin. It was about three miles out over the ridge, but he had told himself that he would walk in again to-morrow, rather than go through that mass of human beings.

He walked rapidly homeward, head down, unheeding the red flags planted along the roadside to indicate that this was the route over which the dog teams must come. He was almost home when he met the first team, the dogs mushing along at a brisk trot. The

driver, running behind his sled, grinned at the youth, but the grin evoked no response. The Hermit's son trudged on. The driver, who had been receiving nothing but cheery greetings and smiles all along the route, risked a tumble to look back at this boy who marched solemnly on without a sidewise glance at the shaggy athletes under his direction.

The boy's garb belied his sour face and cheerless manner. A brightly colored lumberman's jacket hung loosely over his rangy trunk. Atop his curly head, almost but not quite concealing his unruly locks, was a brilliant scarlet tocque, adorned with a long, silky tassel. His trousers, too, were of a bright red complexion—wooly things such as woodsmen wear to protect themselves against the shots of careless hunters. His feet were encased in long white moccasins. The red trousers were tucked into his gray woolen socks just below the knees.

Yet despite this festive costume, the boy moved disconsolately on. The tassel of his cap, playing in the wind like a carefree waif, dangled over his eyes, and he brushed it back with an impatient, almost harsh movement

of his hand. It was as though the tassel were tempting him to smile and he had rebuked it.

The driver, looking back, mused that here was a strange lad.

Sam Briggs was a strange lad. His father, the Hermit, whose body was then in the vault of the village cemetery awaiting burial, had schooled him to be strange. The Hermit himself had been strange, though learned in many things, and he had kept the boy always near him. He had himself taught the boy the things that he would have learned in school. He had taught him also the trade of snowshoe-making, by which they had supported themselves. But he had taught him above all else to distrust everything and everybody.

The boy had learned all things readily and easily. His book education, at sixteen years of age, was better than that of the average high school graduate. His ability at his father's craft was sufficient to make him self-supporting. And his lack of faith in all about him was complete—he did not know why, except that his father had bred it in him.

He had grown up a gloomy, unsociable

boy, content in the quiet, cynical companionship of his hermit father. Other boys of the village had at times tried to become friendly with him, but he had held himself aloof and they had soon given up the attempt. The only vent he had ever allowed to the natural passion of a boy for bright, cheerful things was in the matter of clothes. Somehow it was enough for him to wear things that were gay and almost gaudy. It satisfied him and left him content to be otherwise sombre and quiet.

So Sam Briggs had turned back when he saw that crowd. He had pushed stolidly on when he met that dog team. The one had been something to avoid; the other, something to ignore.

But when he arrived at his cabin he stopped.

"Dead," he muttered. "Dead. Dead."

In all the Hermit's teaching there had been nothing that would help his son to overcome the horrible emptiness that had been a part of him ever since the Hermit died. That awful monosyllable which he had muttered ran constantly through his brain. When he reached the door of his cabin he

had to gather all his courage to push it open and face the emptiness of his home. The Hermit had trusted only the Hermit's son, and the Hermit's son had trusted only the Hermit. And now the Hermit was dead, and the Hermit's son wondered if life would always hurt so fiercely.

He stood there by the roadside, morosely watching his foot push a hole in the snow. Another dog team loomed over the back of the ridge. Sam mechanically raised his eyes and recognized the driver as Jacques Thebault, a trapper who lived on a run-down farm out across the ten-mile woods. Sam had heard men in the village say that Jacques Thebault was a scoundrel, but his father's teaching had been that all men were scoundrels, so he had thought nothing of it.

Jacques was riding on his sled. His dogs were pulling hard and panting from their exertion, and the lead dog, a big, powerful fellow, part husky and part Irish wolfhound, was limping painfully and leaving little tell-tale scarlet spots where his feet touched the white snow. The man's narrow face was screwed up in a snarling scowl; his little eyes were snapping angrily as he

snarled and yelled and cursed at the dogs. He reached into the pocket of his red plaid mackinaw and pulled out a handful of small rocks, which he pelted at his huskies with all his force but without any apparent effect, as they were already straining with all their strength.

As he came up even with Sam, Jacques jammed down the snow brakes, stopping the sled and pulling up the dogs with a jerk. He glanced contemptuously at Sam, but said nothing. Then with a grim leer on his face, he walked up to the lead dog and kicked him sharply as the dog tried to settle himself in the snow to rest his bleeding feet.

"W'at's the matter you, anyway?" he yelled. "You t'ink maybe you lose this race for me, eh? You t'ink I'm not keel you maybe, eh? You no got some spunk—that's the matter you. But I'm give it to you. Oui, oui, I'm give it to you."

He ran back to his sled, took a huge club from it and returned to the lead dog. The dog uttered a low growl at the sight of the club, and stepped backward. The other dogs growled and barked, calling forth a sharp command from Jacques to be still.

"I'm give you some spunk—so!" snarled the driver, bringing his club down on the dog with cruel force. Then another and another, while the dogs all danced around in terror, tangling themselves hopelessly in their harness. Jacques, losing all control of his passion as he saw the harness becoming tangled, rained blow after blow, shouting all the while in mixed French and English oaths.

Sam watched it all as though it were a part of the landscape. In a vague way he felt sorry for the dog, but that monosyllable was still running through his brain and this thing that was going on was somehow detached from him. It was an incident in a world apart. The thought occurred to him, though, that here was a good illustration of his father's teachings concerning the low and brutal nature of men.

Jacques continued to pound savagely. Then a blow went low, and struck the dog across one of his forelegs. His yelping changed to a piercing howl, and he crumpled into the snow. Jacques dropped his club.

"Ah, you t'ink you can fool Jacques, eh?" he snarled, still trying to play the bully des-

pite his very real fear that his anger had cost him his lead dog. "Get up, you. Get up."

He kicked the dog sharply in the ribs, and the dog tried to get to his feet, only to crumple again. More kicks failed to budge him, and suddenly the driver seemed to remember that he was in a race and that his delay might make the difference between victory and defeat. He quickly unhitched the crippled dog and shifted another to the lead position. With difficulty he untangled the harness.

"Mush," he yelled, and started to run behind his diminished team, leaving his victim lying there in the snow.

Then once more a surge of anger seemed to pass over him, and he again clamped down the brakes.

"You lose me this race, you," he shouted, running again toward the cripple. "I'm feex you."

Sam, still watching with a dull and morbid interest, saw him pull a revolver from his pocket. Sam remembered then that this Jacques had the reputation of always carrying a revolver and shooting any stray dogs along the way just for the love of taking

life, justifying himself with the excuse that the strays might interfere with his team. In this instance, though, Sam reflected, the man was doing the most humane thing possible in putting an end to the dog's suffering.

The same thought evidently came to Jacques and displeased him, for he put away the revolver and again seized the club. The dog made a futile effort to crawl out of range. He barely succeeded in lifting his bruised head, but as he did that his eyes met Sam's.

It was a mute appeal, and it gave Sam a violent start. It was all wholly beyond his comprehension, but somehow this cruel drama which he had been watching without concern took on a new and personal aspect. For the first time since his father's death he forgot the emptiness within him. Some new feeling with which he was unfamiliar had submerged it.

Without quite realizing what he was doing, he stepped between the man and the dog.

"Don't strike that dog again," he said evenly. The words came out unbidden.

Jacques looked up in surprise and anger. The lad had been standing there so long

without showing any interest that his belated interference was wholly unexpected.

"Who you t'ink you are, anyway, son of the Hermit?" The driver embellished his question with a new string of oaths. "I'm keel him, that dog. You get out my way or I'm keel you too, you."

He lifted his club to knock Sam from his path. But even as he swung it back he saw another dog team coming up over the ridge. He dropped the club with a yell of rage and ran to his waiting team. Before he could get the dogs kicked to their feet and their harness straightened out, the other team was almost up to Sam and the crippled dog.

"You wait; I'm feex you," he yelled, shaking his fist as he ran down the road.

The driver of the other team looked in astonishment at this pantomime and at the crippled dog at Sam's feet.

"What's going on here?" he shouted.

But Sam merely stared at him and made no answer. The driver wasted no time satisfying his curiosity, but rode on after Jacques. Both teams were soon lost to sight around a bend in the road, and Sam was left alone with the cripple.

CHAPTER II

THE REWARD

SAM looked at the dog, and the dog looked at Sam. In the eyes of the one was only curiosity. In the eyes of the other was gratitude.

"A pretty pickle you've put me in," said Sam to the dog. Then, talking more to himself than to his dumb companion: "Now what in the world did I do that for? Why didn't I mind my own business? I must be crazy."

The dog tried to move, but the pain was still too much for him, and he settled back in the snow again. His eyes followed Sam as the youth walked slowly up and down the road in front of him. Sam stopped and looked at him again.

"You've nothing to thank me for," said Sam, as though replying to the dog's unspoken thoughts. "You would be better off if I had kept out of this. Then that dirty

rat would have killed you and you would have nothing more to worry about. Now here you are lying out here only half dead, thanks to my interference, and probably in the end I'll have to kill you myself."

Two more dog teams, one just behind the other, came down the road, and Sam conceived an idea

"Maybe if I leave you there some driver will pick you up as he goes by," he told the dog. "Then you'll be off my hands, at any rate."

He turned and walked to the cabin. One of the two drivers, passing, shouted at him.

"Hey, what's this dog doing out here?" he demanded.

"How do I know? He's not my dog," Sam yelled back.

"Better take care of him, son. He looks pretty well bunged up." The driver rode on down the road as he shouted. Sam went in the cabin and slammed the door after him.

Sam was angry at himself. He had acted on impulse and in contradiction of all his well-learned rules of conduct. He had not only given a man cause for enmity against

him, but he had saddled himself with an undesired responsibility by preventing that man from killing a crippled dog. But he told himself over and over again that he would not accept that responsibility. Why should a crippled dog be allowed to disrupt the scheme of life of the Hermit's son, who had been taught to be sufficient unto himself and to let the rest of the world go along in its own way?

"No, no," he muttered. "I won't have anything more to do with it."

He built up a fire in his battered stove, and set about preparing to cook his supper. But his mind continued to be occupied with the dog outside.

He found it uncomfortable to think of the dog suffering out there in the snow. But why, why, he asked himself, should he be interested? The dog was a part of the troublesome outside world. Dogs were in the same class with men—no better, no worse—and he wanted to leave both alone and to be left alone by them.

He placed some bacon in the sizzling frying pan, and found himself wondering whether any one had picked up the dog. He

started for the door to find out, but turned back.

"What do I care?" he demanded aloud.

He jiggled the bacon around in the pan. The dog was probably hungry, he thought. But maybe he was in such pain that hunger was forgotten. He threw a fork angrily at the sink as he found that he could not drive such thoughts as these from his mind.

He took the bacon from the pan and began slicing a potato into it. Then he turned his head quickly. There was a feeble scratching at the door. He dropped what was left of the potato into the pan, ran to the door and pulled it open. The dog looked up at him.

It was growing dark outside, but Sam could see plainly the trail the dog had made as he had pulled himself through the snow to the cabin door. It was a labored trail, punctuated with many indentations to show that the cripple had rested frequently from his efforts. A line drawn through the snow told the boy that the dog had dragged one useless leg along with him, and the irregularity of the tracks told him that he had limped badly on the other three legs.

The last of the dog teams must have passed, Sam decided, and all hope of evading responsibility had passed with it. There was the dog, asking to come in—the dog that would have been dead if he had not interfered and saved a life that should not have been saved.

"Oh, all right," said Sam. "Come on in. But it's just for to-night."

The dog quickly availed himself of the invitation, and dragged himself across the threshold. Sam made no move to help, though it was a hard struggle for the injured dog to get into the cabin. Once inside, he lay down on Sam's solitary rag rug and closed his eyes in relief. His right forepaw was doubled under him grotesquely.

Sam closed the door and stood looking at his unwelcome guest. He wondered how he would get rid of the dog in the morning. Perhaps Jacques would come back for it. Not likely, though, considering the animal's present worthlessness. He wondered if there was any provision in the village laws for taking care of injured dogs. Even if there was, which he thought doubtful, he had no way of getting the dog to the village, he

reflected. He glanced at the rifle on the wall.

"I guess that's the only solution, old hound," said he. Yet, even as he spoke, he thought with a start that even this humane solution of the problem might get him into some trouble or other with the dog's owner or the village authorities.

The dog stirred a little and tried helplessly to move the injured leg. He looked up at Sam, and just the trace of a whine came from his throat, as though his body wanted him to yelp but his will suppressed it.

Sam looked at him reflectively, remembering the episode that had brought the dog into his hands. All at once the look of perturbed thoughtfulness that had seemed to be frozen on his countenance left him, and a smile replaced it. He was remembering Jacques and his angry words, and somehow, now that he looked back upon it, the picture was not unmixed with humor.

"You no got some spunk," he said to the dog, mimicking Jacques' fiery attitude. "I'm feex you."

Whether it was the smile or some thought

that went with it, Sam seemed to see the dog in a more favorable light after this bit of play-acting. He knelt down beside the dog and scratched his shaggy head. He began looking over the bruised body. That foreleg was broken, of course, but, in addition to that, the dog was bruised from head to tail. His paws were gashed and cut, and pieces of the sharp ice which had caused the injuries had melted inside the wounds, leaving bits of dirt and pebbles to irritate them. Sam realized then why the dog had been limping so painfully and how the driver's pitiless and unreasoning wrath had been incurred.

"Spunk!" exclaimed the boy. "I'll say you have some spunk, old hound, and plenty of it, to run at all on those old feet. Your name ought to be Spunk."

He stood back and looked at the dog quizzically a moment.

"Come to think of it," said he, "since you have neglected to supply me with a better name to call you, I guess I'll christen you Spunk for the duration of your visit."

He knelt down again.

"So, Spunk, old boy, let's see that bum

paw of yours. Maybe we can fix it up a little."

Sam really knew very little about dressing injuries, but he knew that broken bones had to be set and wounds disinfected and bandaged. So he set about doing the best he knew how.

He noticed the forgotten bacon as he bustled around for bandages and splints, and threw it to the dog. He moved a lantern closer to his patient, and talked to him gently as he worked. The dog yelped a little as he forced the broken bones into place, and whined as he daubed the raw spots with strong disinfectant, but remained still under the ministering hands.

At last the splints were in place, the bandages bound, and the wounds all anointed. The dog that Sam had named Spunk showed through the bandages in places, but his general appearance was that of a railroad wreck victim. Sam lifted him in his arms—which was no slight task—and placed him gently on the bunk that had been the Hermit's.

The dog blinked up at him, and a look of wonder was in his eyes. He had sought

shelter in his extremity, but this treatment was most surprising. He closed his tired eyes and dozed, whining more in his sleep than he had done while awake.

Sam washed his hands and again set about getting his delayed supper. His anger at himself had disappeared, though in the back of his head he knew that he should be reproaching himself for his weak-heartedness.

"Oh, well," he said to himself, "I may as well make him as comfortable as I can tonight, so long as I'm going to get rid of him in the morning anyway."

He cooked more bacon and made tea. Then he sat down at his rough table and satisfied his long-deferred appetite. Having eaten his fill, he lolled back in his chair, stretched out his legs, rested the back of his head in his hands, and proceeded to be comfortable.

Sam did not realize it, but he was happier at that moment than he had been for a long time. A feeling of peace was over him. The emptiness in his heart had been filled, but he did not know it. Of course he still missed the Hermit, but the pain was much less acute.

Like the dog, he dozed. The young mind that had been so troubled rested. His eyelids closed, contentedly.

A sharp rapping at the door brought him to his feet with a jump. In an instant all his misdoubts came back to him. Callers never came to that door except occasional buyers of snowshoes, and they came in the daytime. This visit must be the result of his afternoon's act. He was beginning to pay for his rashness even quicker than he had feared.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

Another series of raps responded, and a voice said, "Open up that door."

No use trying to dodge, Sam reflected. He went to the door and pulled it open. The grizzled whiskers that he saw were those of Horace Simpson, the town constable. He knew that his fears were realized.

"What is it?" he asked.

The grizzled Horace merely glanced at him disapprovingly, and pushed by him into the room. He crossed to the bunk where the dog was just opening his eyes and stirring painfully.

"H'm," said Horace.

"What do you want?" demanded Sam again.

"You, I cal'ate," drawled the constable. "You and this haound."

"What for?"

"Ain't your dog, is he?"

"No," Sam admitted, "but he was hurt and I had to bring him in."

"Hurt, was he?" asked the constable. "Now ain't that a shame? Must of fell daown and brok his leg, didn't he?" The voice was mocking.

"Of course not," said Sam. "That is, his leg is broken, but he didn't do it falling down."

"You don't say," said Horace. "Wa'l you jest listen to me, young feller. I knew your pa, the Hermit, from the time he brought you here when you was jest a little shaver, and he was a queer customer and no mistake. I never figgered no good would come of him or his'n, but I'll tell ye this: he might ha' been crazy and all that, as folks said, but he knew enough to mind his own business, and he never done no harm to nobody nor nothin'. I kind of figgered maybe you'd be pretty much like him, seein' as how

he kept ye by him so close, but here the blood ain't hardly cold in his veins before you go and git downright wild."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Sam.

"Guess you know well enough what I mean," replied the constable. "There's the dog, all beat up just as Jacques said. I ain't sayin' but what that mis'rable Canuck might ha' provoked ye, and if you had beat him up 'stead of his dog, I cal'ate folks might feel a sight more disposed to be easy on ye, but a man or boy that will beat up a dog is a skunk—and you done it."

Sam gaped at the bewhiskered minion of the law in amazement, as the charge revealed itself.

"You mean you think I beat this dog?" he asked.

"Come, come, there ain't no use denyin' it," said the constable. "There's the dog right in your haouse. Three or four of them drivers see ye standin' over it when they went by, and Jacques come in madder'n a wet hen 'cause you started the fight and made him lose the race. Not that I'm sorry about that part of it, as I know."

"But he did it himself; Jacques did it."

"Likely," scoffed the constable. "Him right on the p'int of winnin' the race and the thousand-dollar prize."

"But he did, I tell you," the boy insisted.

"Wa'l, anyway, here's a warrant for your arrest for cruelty to animals, so you be daown to the court 'long abaout nine o'clock to-morrer mornin' and you can tell all that to the jedge."

Horace went over to the bunk and looked speculatively at the dog.

"Guess I'd better take him 'long with me to-night," said he.

"Go ahead. Take him," said Sam defiantly. "But I won't come down to your old court. I haven't done anything, and I won't come."

Horace remained silent and tried to lift up the dog, but the dog growled at his touch and the constable stepped back.

"Won't hey?" he said. "Wa'l, you fetch this dog aout to my pung and then we'll see abaout you."

Sam, thinking fast, decided to obey this order. He lifted Spunk in his arms. Then he paused.

"What are you going to do with the dog?" he inquired.

"Ain't goin' to beat him no more, anyhow. Bring him 'long and don't be askin' questions."

Sam carried the injured creature out through the door and settled him gently on the pile of old rugs that Horace had brought for the purpose in the back of his pung. He knew that he should feel relieved to be rid of the dog, at least, but somehow he did not. He turned to the constable.

"Ain't changed your mind?" Horace asked.

"No."

"Better think it over. I'd hate to have to drive up here again in the mornin' to get ye."

"I won't come," the boy insisted.

"What if I should take ye with me naow?"

"I don't care."

"I'd have to lock ye up over night."

"I don't care."

The constable scratched his head in perplexity.

"You stubborn little fool, think what you're sayin'," he said, raising his voice.

"I don't care," the boy persisted.

The constable took him by the arm and pushed him into the seat of the pung.

"I ain't goin' to fool araound with ye any more," said he. "I'll lock ye up and have it done with."

"I don't care."

"Giddap," said Horace.

They slid along over the snow with only the plod, plod of the horse's hoofs and an occasional low yelp from Spunk breaking the silence of the night. Sam idly watched the flickering light from the lantern as it reflected from the dashboard on the snow.

"Ain't much of a talker, are ye?" said the constable at last, growing bored at the silence.

Sam verified the truth of his forced companion's observation by remaining silent, and thus they finished their ride to town together.

They rode straight down the deserted and darkened main street, where earlier in the day there had been so much excitement, and stopped in front of the Opera House, which also housed the offices of the town officials and the court room.

"Git out," directed the constable, and Sam obeyed.

Horace led the way down the alley beside the building to the basement entrance in the rear. He unlocked the door, and taking Sam by the arm guided him through the cobwebs to the three grated cells which constituted the village lock-up. With a huge key he unlocked one of the cell doors. He shoved Sam inside, closed the door again and turned the key in the lock.

"Ain't been nobody in here before for quite a spell," he observed.

He departed, and Sam flung himself down on the hard cot.

"Serves me right," he muttered, "for a meddlesome fool."

At length he dropped off to sleep, and dreamed that he and the Hermit were making snowshoes together again, and the Hermit was telling him that the world was not to be trusted, nor anybody in it, nor anything in it.

CHAPTER III

EXHIBIT A

IN the morning the little courtroom was filled to overflowing, for Jacques had made his accusation against Sam before the whole crowd at the finish line. It had been done, furthermore, in that dramatic manner which a French Canadian uses when excited, with much flourishing of arms and many expletives. Jacques had planned it carefully, for his cunning mind told him that his only chance of winning the race, after his disastrous fit of anger, was to make the judges believe he was entitled to an allowance of time. He had therefore protested the race, and the judges were withholding their decision pending the outcome of Sam's appearance before the judge of the court.

So every seat in the little courtroom and every window ledge was occupied long before it was time for proceedings to begin. And when the available seats were filled,

folks began to crowd the aisles and the corners. They talked in loud and excited voices, until the resultant chorus was like a shrill buzz-saw working side by side with a halting gasoline engine.

The talk was all on one subject, and that subject was the Hermit's son. The town had always looked upon both the Hermit and his son as unnatural, because they had held themselves apart. But this new and heinous offense charged against the boy had aroused the town to a fever pitch of indignation. Those words which the constable had used in talking with Sam expressed the feeling of the town: "A man or boy that will beat up a dog is a skunk."

Coming at a time when dogs were the main object of interest, the incident had aroused an even greater amount of resentment than would have been the case at another time. As for Sam's guilt, that was taken for granted. What would one expect from such a son of such a father? The only question was: What could the judge do with the boy?

The crowd talked on, and Horace, the grizzled constable, elbowed his way here and

there, talking with first one group and then another like a deacon before the church services. Now and then he would break a sentence short to shout to some newcomer that the front bench was for witnesses and must not be used by spectators. Two of the dog drivers were already sitting on this bench, and the men in the bench behind were plying them with questions.

A shuffling of feet near the door heralded a new arrival, and Jacques pushed his way through the crowded aisle. Ordinarily the appearance of Jacques would have been greeted only with scornful glances and whisperings, for the town knew no good of him, but to-day he was something of a martyr; at least, Sam's supposed villainy so far outshone his that he seemed heroic by comparison. So men and women nodded encouragingly as he came in; small boys outside the door tried to tag at his heels; Horace beckoned to him, and majestically ushered him to a seat with the other witnesses, shooing away the usual crowd of small boys as he did so.

There followed a whispered conversation between Horace and Jacques, after which

the former straightened up with self-importance and strode out of the room.

Sam, meanwhile, had consumed the meagre breakfast which the constable had brought him earlier in the morning, and was waiting impatiently to undergo his ordeal. His philosophy of life left him little room for hope of convincing the judge, but yet the natural faith of a boy in the truth lurked in the back of his head and contradicted his pessimism. Anyway, he would tell the truth, and if it availed him nothing he would never again allow impulse to lead him from his father's teaching. He would know that there were no fair deals in life, and that the best way to get along was to avoid as much of life as possible.

He was sitting on the edge of the cot when the constable came again. He watched the key turn in the lock, but he made no move. He noticed, too, that Horace's nickel star glistened, and seemed to have been newly polished.

"Come on," said Horace.

Sam rose and followed him out. The brisk winter air was good in his nostrils, and he hesitated a moment to take a deep whiff.

The constable took him impatiently by the arm, and marched on up the alley.

Outside the front door was a numerous crowd—those who had come too late to get into the courtroom. They stared, nudged each other, and talked excitedly as Horace paraded his prisoner by them. Sam, always uneasy at the sight of a crowd, involuntarily quickened his step, but Horace, glorying in his importance, held him back and proceeded with deliberate tread.

They marched through the corridor, where more curious ones stared, and on into the courtroom. The confusion of voices died away for just an instant as they appeared in the doorway, but then redoubled itself. An aisle was opened as though automatically, and Horace led the accused culprit down to the straight-backed chair beside the judge's desk that served as a prisoner's box. He shoved Sam into the chair, and stood guard beside him, as if expecting a dash for liberty at any moment.

Sam sat facing the crowd, and it made him uneasy. He wanted to flee, not from the course of justice or misjustice, as the case might be, but from that mob of humanity in

front of him. In that moment, as he looked into those faces and read not one note of sympathy or trust, he hated people as he had never hated them before with all his father's tutoring in hatred. He looked down at the floor, but his mind still saw those staring, condemning faces.

Again there was a shuffling and stirring around the door. Sam raised his eyes and saw the judge entering.

Judge Baldwin was short and fat, looking for all the world as though he should have been a baker presiding over a manufactory of jelly doughnuts for hungry youngsters. The spectacles that sat down well on the tip of his pug nose gave him a comic-opera appearance, although it was his fond belief that they lent him an added air of dignity. Dignity, indeed, was his hobby, and he had taken himself seriously for so many years that he was now taken seriously by all his townsfolks, despite his roly-polyness. Realizing his handicap, he left nothing undone to impress every one with his utter loftiness of mind and sobriety of thought.

He marched sedately down the aisle, his black frock coat, now turning a sickly green

with age, flapping around his pudgy knees. He looked straight ahead, seeming to have his eyes fixed on something miles away, but a frown signified his disapproval of the loud talking in his courtroom. Horace, the constable, who prided himself on understanding the judge as few lesser mortals could, interpreted the frown and acted upon it by raising a warning hand and shushing loudly. The judge mounted to his desk, which was placed on a little platform such as teachers have in their schoolrooms.

He stood for a moment behind his desk, frowning at the crowd. Then he beckoned the constable. There followed a whispered conversation and Horace stepped down and whispered to some of the men sitting in the front of the room.

"You're s'posed to git up when the jedge comes in," he whispered.

The men rose laboriously, while Horace whispered to another group. In this manner he brought the spectators all to their feet, thus satisfying the judge's sense of propriety. Then the judge sat down, and Horace signified with a wave of the hand that the others might do likewise. They did.

The judge rapped on his desk with a gavel which he produced from the depths of his frock coat.

"The court will come to order," he pronounced.

It did so, more or less, although there were still enough whisperings to bring disapproving glances from the judge and agitated signs from the constable.

Sam was still looking at the floor, and he continued to do so while the judge satisfied to the full his love for pomposity, throwing in all the extra flourishes that he could think of to impress the unusually large number of spectators. After what seemed an interminable time, Sam heard the judge call his name, and felt Horace tugging at his arm. He rose and faced the judge.

"Sam Briggs," said the judge, still frowning over his spectacles, "you are charged with assault, larceny of a valuable quadruped, to wit, one dog belonging to Jacques Thebault, and cruelty to animals by beating, striking and—er—hitting said quadruped or dog. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," said Sam.

"Your honor," whispered Horace.

"What?" asked Sam.

"Say, 'Not guilty, your honor,' " repeated the constable.

"Not guilty, your honor," amended the prisoner.

"H'm," said the judge. "Why don't you plead guilty?"

"Because I'm not. I didn't do it. I just—"

"Order," roared the judge, pounding furiously with his gavel, as a burst of talk and sneering laughter greeted Sam's protestations of innocence. The tumult melted into a few whisperings and giggles.

"Now, then, Constable, who's complainant in this case?" asked the judge, just as though he had not the slightest idea, though he looked at Jacques as he put the query.

"Jacques Thebault, your honor," responded Horace.

Jacques rose to his feet, but the judge, not to be rushed through his formalities, glared stonily over his head.

"Is he here, Constable?" he inquired, soberly. "If so, bring him forward."

As Jacques was already as far forward as he could go without mounting the judge's

platform, Horace merely nodded for him to remain standing. The judge then took cognizance of his presence, and swore him in as a witness. After a few preliminary questions, the reason for which only the judge himself understood, and perhaps not even he, Jacques was allowed to tell his version of the happenings on the ridge.

And such a version it was! Sam, realizing that he was going to hear some lies, gaped in amazement at his accuser as he heard the remarkable tale unfolded.

"M'sieu the judge, I'm drive those dog down the road fast—vaire fast like every-t'ing. I'm win that race—easy I'm win him. I'm come up over that ridge fast—oh, oui, vaire, vaire fast. By'm'by in just two, t'ree secon's that boy, those Hermit's son what you call, she joomp out from those bush—va!—like that. Those dog, he joomp back qu'eek. The harness, she get all mix' up—ooh bad. I'm stop those dog, mad like anyt'ing. I'm tell heem 'Va, go 'way!' But I'm win those race, so by'm'by queek, I'm lean ovaire to feex those harness. Then w'at you t'ink? That boy, she take a beeg club, beeg like anyt'ing, those club, and she

knock me down poof, like that. Then she begin pound one those dog. She pound him like this, like that, like everyt'ing. Me, I'm try to get up, and she knock me down one other tam'. Then she pound those dog some more, poof and poof and poof. She do that some more and some more, and by'm'by those dog, she just fall all down, no good. Then that boy, she sweeng those club some more, and I'm don' w'at I'm do. But that boy, she take those dog out from those harness and drag heem away queek. I'm worry now I'm no win those race, so I'm not chase heem. I'm drive down those road vaire, vaire fast, but I'm no win those race."

Jacques paused, looking very innocent and injured, while the courtroom buzzed and the judge looked more solemn than ever.

The other drivers who had passed Sam while he was outside with the dog then told briefly what they had seen. One had seen Sam standing over the injured dog while Jacques drove away shaking his fist. Two others had seen him leaving the dog by the roadside, and one of them had advised him to take care of it. The judge's frown grew more and more severe as the evidence against

Sam piled up. Sam waited quietly, but with an increasingly heavy heart.

At length the judge ordered that the prisoner rise and be sworn. This ceremony was accomplished, and Sam was ordered to say what he had to say. He turned his back on the crowd and told the judge in as few words as possible what had happened. He spoke in a low voice, and the spectators leaned forward in their chairs in their attempt to hear him.

He was standing in front of his house, he said, when Jacques drove up and stopped. Jacques himself beat the dog and left it lying in the roadside. He merely took the animal into his house because it was badly injured.

He said nothing of his interference in the dog's behalf, having some vague fear that such an admission would put him in a less favorable light in the eyes of justice—if there was any justice.

"Is that all?" asked the judge.

Sam nodded.

"Then sit down."

Sam sat.

"Your honor,"—it was Horace address-

ing the judge—"the dog's aout in the tax c'lector's office if you'd like to look at it."

"Bring it in," ordered his honor. Then, as an afterthought, "Mark it Exhibit A."

Horace motioned to Jacques, and the two left the room, while the buzzing broke out anew at this unexpected development. The judge pounded in vain with his gavel. Presently the two men returned, bearing the dog on an impromptu stretcher. They sat the stretcher down on the platform beside the judge, and the dog tried to rise, but Jacques ordered him to be still and he settled down again.

Jacques started to show the judge the dog's injuries, and ended by excitedly repeating his account of the affair. The judge gravely leaned over to look at the dog, and as he did so, Jacques' hand, which was waving wildly in accompaniment with his words, landed with a resounding whack on the judicial face. It was a terrific blow to the judge's dignity, and he straightened up with a look of pained surprise. Several titters were quickly suppressed by his frown. Jacques attempted an excited apology, but subsided when he saw the glare in the

judge's eyes. He sat down on the platform beside the dog, which was again stirring uneasily.

The judge took recourse to his gavel again, and cleared his throat. He looked at Sam, and Sam knew that his appeal to truth had failed.

But what did it matter? What did anything matter? Life had been pleasant enough while he and the Hermit had worked and played together, but since the Hermit had died it had all been bitterness. Let them put him in jail if they wanted to. It could be no worse there than it was outside. There had been times when he and the Hermit had been very happy, and he had wondered if the world was really as bad as the Hermit seemed to think. Now he thought the Hermit had understated the case against the world. He hated it from the bottom of his heart.

The judge was talking.

"The prisoner in this case is a minor," he was saying. "It is therefore incumbent upon the court to treat him as a minor."

Words—thought Sam—just words.

"He is a boy who could not be expected to

be quite normal, as his father was a peculiar man."

Sam remembered that his father used to make a great joke of the judge's solemnity.

"The present charges against him, however, h'mm—the judge cleared his throat again—are of a most grave nature."

Sam felt it coming, and an involuntary sigh escaped him. He looked around quickly to see if any one had detected him in this act of weakness. His eyes rested for a moment on Jacques, who was gazing attentively at the ceiling, and then on the injured dog, Spunk.

Spunk's eyes met Sam's and the dog's head came up. Then, without warning, as though he read the despair in the eyes of the boy who had been Good Samaritan to him, he struggled to his feet and painfully jumped to the floor, limping over to Sam before Jacques could grab him.

The judge halted in his discourse, confused.

Jacques yelled: "W'at's the matter, you? Come here."

But Spunk was rubbing up against Sam, and licking his hand. Sam scratched the

dog's head, and the dog stretched himself out at his feet, contentedly.

Jacques seized him by the collar, and started to drag him roughly away. Spunk growled at this treatment.

"Wait a minute," ordered the judge.

Jacques stood up and started to speak, but the judge held up his hand for silence. Jacques obeyed, but the rest of the courtroom was too excited to be still. The judge finally gained comparative silence by dint of much pounding with his gavel.

A brilliant thought had come to the judge —such a thought as comes only once in a lifetime. He saw his great opportunity for convincing the town beyond the shadow of a doubt that his wisdom and sagacity had seldom been equalled in history.

He spoke in his best courtroom voice: "Once there was a very wise man. His name was Solomon. You may remember the famous case when he passed judgment on the maternity of a baby. A dog, however, has more sense than a baby—("The idea!" said a feminine voice in the back of the courtroom)—and it occurred to me that the dog's manner might help me solve the

difficult problem of who is telling the truth here. It has done so. I find the prisoner not guilty, and he is herewith discharged."

Everybody began to talk at once; Sam trying to thank the judge; Jacques trying to protest; the spectators trying to tell one another that the judge was a most remarkable man; the constable trying to tell the spectators to be quiet. The judge rapped and rapped, but in vain. Finally he despaired. He cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled as loudly as he could through them: "Court's dismissed."

The crowd began to mill around the judge and around Sam. Several tried to shake hands with Sam, but he put his hands in his pockets. They had all been against him five minutes before, why should he pretend to like them? His dislike for crowds had always been great, and now it was intensified. He wanted to go out, away from them, and he knew he was at liberty to do so, yet something held him there. He tried to think what it was. Somebody stepped on Spunk's tail, bringing forth a yelp from the dog—and then he knew. Yes, that was it—he was staying in that hateful crowd be-

cause Spunk was there. He looked down at the dog and the dog was looking at him. He leaned down and patted him. He knew he had a friend then, and that friend was Spunk. He wanted him. He wanted to take him back to the cabin. He could sleep in the Hermit's bunk.

He felt his hand being shaken again, and realized that the judge was shaking it. The judge also was talking, although Sam was so confused that he had not the slightest idea what he was saying.

"Thank you," said Sam, when the judge stopped talking. Then, by some chance he remembered Horace's whispered directions and added, "your honor."

The judge looked pleased, and Sam mustered up his courage. "May I take Spunk —that is, the dog—home with me?"

"Oh, no, no," said the judge. "He'll have to be put out of his misery."

CHAPTER IV

A SPONSOR

JUDGE BALDWIN'S Solomon-like decision had the desired effect on the townsfolks. Ten minutes after it was rendered, it was the chief subject of conversation on the street, in the drug store, and in the other gathering places of the village. The people in the courtroom who had been unable to push their way to the side of the judge or Sam had hurried forth to be the first to spread the news. Telephones rang busily, and those who were not quick enough to get a desired line first had to wait many minutes for others to get through recounting all the details to raptly listening friends.

Even Mr. Roderick Spencer of Boston, though a stranger in the town, had heard all about the remarkable decision within a few minutes after court had been dismissed. Mr. Spencer was one of the partners of that well-known old Boston firm of Spencer, Spencer and Bruce. In the business world

he was called "a power," but East Bryantsville was rather far removed from that world and knew him as "a rich sport."

The latter term, in its usual somewhat derisive meaning, fitted him poorly. As a matter of fact, Mr. Spencer was rich and he was a sportsman, but he was a sportsman in the best meaning of the word. Always a lover of strong, active dogs, he had become interested, of recent years, in the sport of dog racing. Two of the drivers in the race had driven "under his colors," as the newspaper reporters put it, meaning that his financial assistance had made it possible for them to participate in the race.

He was walking along the street with one of those drivers when he learned of the outcome of the judge's hearing. The driver was the winner of the race—now that Jacques' protests had been exploded. "Happy Henri" Rousseau was the name this driver went under, the "Henri" having been given him at birth and the "Happy" probably soon after as a result of his perpetual smile. It was he, indeed, who had grinned at Sam the day before as the boy trudged soberly homeward.

He was a popular champion, this little Frenchman from Quebec. He talked little, but his smile made up for the lack of words just as his litheness and vigor made up for his smallness of stature. Mr. Spencer had been praising him warmly and receiving a modest grin in return when one of the judge's admirers interrupted to tell them of Sam's acquittal. They listened with interest.

"That makes you the winner, Henri," said Mr. Spencer.

Happy Henri's smile only expanded the more.

"By golly, it does, don't it?" exclaimed the newsbearer, suddenly realizing with a thrill of pleasure the importance of the message he was bringing.

"Well, sir," he went on, "nobody supposed for a minute but that the Hermit's son had run amuck. 'Course that feller Jacques is a bad egg an' all that, but this boy's a queer sort of feller, too. He's always lived up there alone with his pa, the Hermit —he died just a little spell back—and nobody would ha' been surprised at nothing from him, you know."

"I figger the judge must ha' sort of felt the same way about it, but he's a wise old owl, and he don't aim to be hasty, so he watches that dog to see what he'll do, and—well, that's how it happened. That's some judgin', ain't it?"

The Boston man nodded. "But what about this boy?" he asked. "He sounds like an interesting character."

"Oh, he ain't of much account," replied the informant. "Oh, Bill, did you hear about—" He rushed across the street to tell the story over again to a new listener.

But while the town was thus glorying in the profound wisdom of its judiciary, the boy whose innocence had been so cleverly ascertained was failing to get much joy out of his deliverance. Spunk was to be "put out of his misery." And Sam realized that this meant that he was to be left to continue in his own misery.

Just a few hours before he had considered shooting the dog himself. He had wanted to be rid of it. Now he thought of the dog as his only friend. It was as though he had known him and been pals with him for years. He imagined that he felt toward Spunk

more or less as his father, the Hermit, had felt toward him. Perhaps neither he nor his father had ever been true hermits after all. They needed some sort of companionship in their solitude.

He sat down and stroked the dog's head. Spunk feebly wagged his tail and blinked up at him.

"Judge—your honor—I'll take care of him. I'll make him comfortable. He'll be all right," pleaded the boy.

The judge frowned anew at this questioning of his wisdom.

"Now, now, my boy," said he, "you are a very fortunate youth to have been freed of the charge against you. In many courts—hum—you would have been unable to overcome the seeming preponderance of evidence against you. Now my advice to you is to run along home and not be trying to—ah—interfere in the—er—course of justice as administered by those who—ah—are wiser than you."

"But judge, I'll take care of him. He'll be all right." The boy could think of nothing else to say.

"That's enough of that," said the judge,

sternly. "He is going to be put out of his misery."

"M'sieu,"—it was Jacques entering the conversation—"that dog, she no good no more. She have to be shot. She not wort' two, t'ree cent no more."

"I don't care how much he's worth. You can't shoot him. You can't, you can't." Sam struggled to hold down his voice, but it was shrill in spite of him.

"Of course he will have to be shot," said the judge, "but"—turning to Jacques—"I want no advice from you, sir." To Sam: "And I will stand no more nonsense from you, sir."

"But I say you can't shoot him," Sam persisted.

The judge beckoned to Horace, who was busily talking with a group of people near the door.

"Constable," said he, "I must ask you to take this boy out of here."

"Come on, young feller," said the constable, taking Sam by the arm.

Sam knew it was of no use to struggle. "There are only heartaches to be had from contact with the world," his father had told

him, and he reflected that he was learning the truth of that statement with a vengeance.

Spunk had been snarling a little in sympathy with Sam, knowing by the tone of his voice that something was sadly amiss. He snarled more as Horace laid his hand on the boy's arm. But Sam, abandoning hope, hung back long enough to give the dog a reassuring pat, and Spunk, though only half convinced, subsided into silence and followed Sam out with his eyes.

In the doorway the boy looked back at the dog. Their eyes met again, and Spunk, sensing anew the fact that Sam was acutely unhappy, struggled to stand on his three good legs. Jacques, standing over him, cuffed him down and uttered a sharp command. The dog whined, and the constable yanked San into the corridor.

Realizing that a struggle would avail him nothing, yet Sam hung back, making the constable yank and drag him along the corridor to the street door. There the constable gave him a vigorous shove, and Sam half flew and half staggered into the street.

Unmanly but shameless tears blinded his eyes—tears engendered by both anger and

grief. He hastily wiped them away with the back of his hand as he landed with a jolt up against two men. He started to back away from them, but one of the men—the one with the city clothes—held him by the shoulders, and Sam felt too weak to resist the grasp.

"What seems to be the trouble?" inquired the man in a friendly voice.

"Nothing," said Sam, anxious to be alone.

The other man spoke—the little one with the leather jacket, woolen trousers and moccasins: "M'sieu, ees it not that boy, those Hermit's son, yes?"

Mr. Spencer looked inquiringly at Sam.

"What do you care? Let me alone, can't you?" said the boy.

"Surely. I don't mean to be unkind. I merely thought Henri and I might be able to help you. You seemed to be very unhappy."

Sam lost all control of himself as the city man released him. He wanted to run home. He wanted to go back into the courtroom. He wanted to pound the judge with his fists and kick Jacques with his feet. And he wanted to crumple up and cry like a girl. So he stood still.

"They can't kill him! They can't!" he burst out suddenly.

"Who? What?" cried Mr. Spencer.

"W'at you say, keel?" echoed the driver.

Sam turned to flee from the curiosity of these men. But just as he turned, Spunk issued from the door trying hard to run on his three legs and dragging the bandaged one. Sam shouted and the dog stopped. Jacques ran out, shouting like a madman, and the judge panted along behind him.

"Stop him," shouted the judge between pants.

Sam stood over the dog protectingly. "You can't kill him, I say," he cried.

The judge endeavored to regain his wind and his dignity. Jacques drew near the boy and the dog as he would have crept up on a ferocious beast. The two strangers stood still and watched proceedings.

"Come, come," said the judge. "Let's have no more of this foolishness."

"Pardon me, but are you not Judge Baldwin?" Mr. Spencer broke in.

The judge struggled harder to control his breathing, and turned to face the speaker. Jacques also turned. A nod of recognition,

but cool recognition, passed between the two drivers.

"I am Judge Baldwin."

"May I not congratulate you on your splendid decision this morning. I have heard your praises sung so warmly that I could not restrain myself from speaking to you." A more modest man than the judge might have thought Mr. Spencer was playing on his vanity, but the judge only grew the more pompous.

"It was a rather difficult case, or would have been for many judges," he admitted. "By the way, I don't believe I have had the honor of making your acquaintance before."

"My name is Roderick Spencer."

"Indeed, I have heard of you.

The men shook hands.

"This is my very good friend, Henri Rousseau, Judge Baldwin," said Mr. Spencer.

"How do you do, Henri?" said the judge, patronizingly. He felt very much pleased with himself to be receiving the homage of such a man as Roderick Spencer, knowing as few others in the town did that Mr. Spencer was something more than "a rich sport."

Here was a man, he told himself, who could appreciate real judicial wisdom.

Sam and Jacques stood glowering at each other as this dialogue went on. Spunk lay quiet at Sam's feet.

The judge and the man from Boston discussed the judge's decision. The judge talked of it in a way that was just modest enough to show his really fine opinion of himself, and Mr. Spencer continued to express his great admiration of the judge's sagacity.

"I must confess, Judge Baldwin, that this boy here interests me a great deal," said the city man.

The judge glanced at Sam, somewhat surprised that any one should find anything interesting in such a dubious character. He was not to be made stupid in this great man's eyes, however, and he attempted a doubtful smile.

"Yes, yes," he said, for lack of anything else to say.

"He seems to be as fond of the dog as the dog is of him," continued Mr. Spencer.

The judge nodded

"Is the dog in a hopeless condition?"

"Oh, yes, I'm afraid so," said the judge.

"It seems too bad to make a tragedy of this friendship between two friendless creatures."

The judge looked doubtful.

"Henri knows about all there is to be known about dogs," continued Mr. Spencer. "Why don't you let him look the dog over, at least?"

"Why, surely," the judge agreed. "Glad to have him do it."

Mr. Spencer nodded to Henri, who stepped to Sam's side and knelt down beside the dog. He ran his hands all over the dog, pausing now and then to pat him reassuringly and speaking to him softly. Then he lifted the injured leg. Tenderly he unwrapped the bandage, and inspected the splints. Then he wrapped them carefully again, scratched the injured dog's head and rose.

"He's one seeck dog," he pronounced, "but she's get well by'm'by if she's use' good. She's be lame all time, I t'ink, but she's not be seeck aft' that leg, she heal."

"Bah, you don' know not'ing," said Jacques, and he walked rapidly down the

street away from the group. Henri grinned after him.

The judge was meditating.

"But who is going to take care of the dog?" he pondered. "You see, Mr. Spencer, I've known this boy most of his life, and while he may be interesting, I seriously doubt the wisdom of trusting him. You perhaps know the circumstances of his life."

"You may be right, Judge Baldwin, but if you will permit me I will make a suggestion. I have already made arrangements for Henri to stay in your town this year and train some more dogs for me. I made the arrangement so I could easily get to visit him now and then. He will be back here immediately after the Quebec races. Now my suggestion is that you let the boy keep the dog, and Henri can keep an eye on the both of them. Knowing Henri's feelings toward dogs, I can assure you that he will not hesitate to report any failure to give the animal proper treatment."

A new obstacle occurred to the judge. "But the dog belongs to Jacques," he objected.

Mr. Spencer shrugged. "He doesn't seem

very anxious to take charge of it. At any rate he has gone away and left it lying here. Surely there can be nothing wrong in letting the boy care for it under the circumstances."

The judge shook his head doubtfully. "All right," said he. "I won't interfere. But I must say I have my doubts of the wisdom of humoring this harum-scarum boy."

Sam had been listening to the dialogue with increasing hope. Now he leaped to his feet from his position beside Spunk.

"You mean I can have him?" he cried.

"It means I wash my hands of the whole affair," said the judge, not very well pleased at having upset his first decision. "You have only Mr. Spencer to thank, if you have it in you to thank anybody for anything. But remember there is nothing legal about this. You take the dog on your own responsibility. And mind you treat him well, too."

Sam rushed back to the dog, and rubbed his head joyfully. Spunk forced a tired wag from his tail in realization that there was cause for rejoicing. The judge stood frowning slightly on the pair, while Mr. Spencer watched them with a faint and

friendly smile, and Happy Henri grinned all over his face.

Sam bethought himself of the judge's words, and realized that the simplicity of his life had been pretty thoroughly shattered—and he did not care. He had accepted the responsibility of caring for a dog. He had allowed himself to become obligated to this city man and this dog driver. He had left himself open to the backbiting of that Jacques, by taking charge of the dog. And yet he was glad of it. Somehow life looked different than it ever had before.

He had never learned to be gracious with people, but he knew he should thank Mr. Spencer and Henri—and he wanted to thank them. Still enough of his old spirit was within him to withhold as much as possible of the admission of obligation. He looked up at the men.

"Thank you," he said briefly, and let it go at that.

Mr. Spencer nodded recognition of the thanks, and Henri continued to grin.

Sam, feeling self-conscious, looked away.

Across the street he saw Jacques scowling at him.

CHAPTER V

PALS

THE coming of Spunk into Sam's life marked the birth of a new Sam. And the coming of Sam into Spunk's life marked the birth of a new Spunk. Spunk, who had not the human characteristic of firmly entrenched prejudice to overcome, changed his outlook much more quickly and with less reflection than Sam. But the change in the end was no more complete.

When they had first come home from the village after the trial, in a sleigh hired by Mr. Spencer, Sam had still in the back of his head the conviction that he was doing something he would regret. Nor did his ever-increasing fondness for the dog drive that belief out until after a long time. It was only after many months that he learned to say to himself that whatever troubles the dog might bring, he was worth them all a hundred times.

Spunk had needed a great deal of care at

first, and his injuries made him somewhat fretful. But most of the time he showed plainly his gratefulness for Sam's ministrations, with much wagging of his tail and with much use of his expressive eyes. Yet it was hard, very hard, for him to lie idly in the cabin—he who had been the most active of active dogs.

The cuts and bruises healed quickly, but the broken bone was not so easly mended. When it did begin to knit, the dog required even more attention than when he had been weaker, for he wanted to be up and out, exercising his aching muscles and knowing the joy of life in the open. Several times Sam came in to find him standing at the door, pawing to get out, and he had to all but carry him back to his bunk.

This constant care of the dog brought to Sam a sense of responsibility—that thing which he had always avoided. He realized that he was acquiring it, and he was surprised to find that it was not irksome at all, but pleasant. He almost dreaded to have the dog get well, fearing that some change might come into their relationship.

Now and then Henri came to the cabin,

and Sam found himself taking a new attitude towards him, too. The little Frenchman never said or did anything to arouse any suspicions of insincerity. He just smiled most of the time and talked about Spunk and dogs in general, when he talked at all. He gave Sam a great deal of valuable advice about the best way to take care of the injured dog, and helped in every way he could to speed the invalid's recovery.

It was easy to see that dogs were his main interest in life. On the rare occasions when he spoke of human beings, he usually judged them by their attitude toward dogs. He liked people, because, as he pointed out, after all they are very much like dogs at heart—and that was a supreme compliment from Henri to the human race.

"Way far up Nort', where I come from," he told Sam one day, "the dog, she have to be your frien', or you don' have some frien'. Mos' all time we have the snow, and the dog, she tak' everyt'ing in and out those Nort' Country. She tak' the mail; she tak' the food; she tak' the medicine. No man, he can live up there wit'out those dog. And he

learn to know those dog, too—they are his frien'. He live with his dog."

Sam had been silent after this long speech, picturing to himself the white solitude suggested by Henri's words. He had pictured himself driving a dog team across the vast white spaces of the Northland. Spunk would be leading the team, of course, and at the end of the long day they would find Henri waiting for them with his twinkling eyes and his happy smile.

Henri had guessed at his thoughts.

"The dog, she is just as good frien' here if you make him your frien'," he had said.

So, from Henri, Sam absorbed a new philosophy to fit the new life that Spunk was revealing to him.

At last Spunk was considered strong enough to use his legs, and then began still another phase of the companionship between the boy and the dog. The leg was still stiff, and Spunk walked and ran with a slight limp, but this could not detract from his joy in his newly regained freedom. It seemed that he never could get enough of romping and flexing the long-unused muscles. He led Sam for long jaunts through

the woods and fields, and when they returned he was still full of life and strength and wanted to roll and play. Sam would have to laugh at the dog's enthusiasm and go about his household duties.

The winter had passed while Spunk was still confined to the cabin, and now the meadows were green and the days warm. Spunk felt the warm weather, the husky blood in him fairly boiling under the bright sun, but he was so busy making up for lost exercise that he had no time to think about such minor discomforts, and he soon acclimated himself. When he became too warm, he would lead Sam down to the river for a swim.

Sam, meanwhile, was putting in most of his time at his father's trade of snowshoe-making. Several orders had come from people who did not know that the Hermit had died, and when Sam had filled them he had received more in his own name. He thus made enough money to buy the supplies needed to live and to take care of Spunk, and also was able to put a little money away for future use. One teaching of the Hermit's remained through all the change in Sam's

outlook, and that was the joy of knowledge —the happiness to be had from books. Sam spent some of his money to buy books, which he read during the evenings while Spunk dozed at his feet; but he saved as much as possible, hoping sometime to have enough to go away to a college where there would be no end of books and some one to take the Hermit's place in selecting them for him.

And so the summer passed, with work and play. For Spunk it was all play. Indeed, he had almost forgotten the feeling of wearing a harness. But sometimes, when he would be trotting over the cool sod of a brook-watered meadow, it would seem as though that cool sod was soft snow, and he would be conscious of a keen desire to feel the straps over his powerful shoulders and the breath of the other dogs on his haunches. Then the memory of a terrible beating would return to him, and he would run very fast in his eagerness to put that memory behind him.

The leaves on the trees around the cabin were turning gold, and the air was taking on a chill that gave new life to Spunk, when Mr. Spencer made his first trip to the ridge. Sam was working busily on some snowshoes,

and Spunk was prowling about in the woods behind the cabin. Sam heard the automobile chug up the hill and stop in front of his door. He knew that Henri always came afoot, and supposed that this was some customer after snowshoes, so he went on with his work and waited for whoever it was to come to the door.

He had often thought of Mr. Spencer, and Henri's praise of his master had almost brought the boy to the point of considering him another exception to the Hermit's rule of the absolute villainy of mankind, but when he opened the door and recognized his visitor he was too confused to follow out the plans he had long ago made to thank him when he should see him again. Instead he just stood and held the door open, trying to say something, but being unable to summon the words from his throat, so overcome was he.

Mr. Spencer soon made him feel easy in his presence, however, talking to him as to an old friend. When he asked about Spunk, Sam was for going at once and bringing the dog in, but Mr. Spencer insisted on going along with him and finding the dog. Spunk

responded quickly to Sam's call, running out of the woods.

"Why, he doesn't even limp!" exclaimed the visitor.

Sam beamed. "He did limp a little until just a few days ago," he said. He rubbed the dog's neck as the animal leaped up on him.

Mr. Spencer drew nearer, and examined the leg that had been broken.

"Wonderful," he said. "It looks perfect. I believe he is as sound as he ever was in his life."

"Henri says so," the boy said, happily.

Spunk's infirmity did not return. Once more he was the active dog of other days, though as the days grew colder he became more and more restless for the sled and the team. He fought against this restlessness by running and playing the more, and Sam humored him as often as he could by running and playing with him. Sam was relieved to find that the dog's activity had not destroyed the fellowship between them, but had instead made it all the stronger. They were now pals.

The first flurry of snow drove Spunk

nearly frantic with joy. He fairly basked in it, as a dog with less love for rigor would have basked in a gentle sun. He raised his voice in long, deep-throated yelps of joy. He ran and leaped about excitedly, and teased at Sam until the boy came out and joined him in the open, where they could feel the sweetness of the cool snowflakes as they fell.

This snow melted as fast as it struck the ground, but later other storms came, and soon the landscape was taking on the whiteness that Spunk loved. It puzzled him that this should not be the signal for the getting out of a sled and the banding together of a team for him to lead. He tried to make Sam understand the question, but the boy could not know how deeply the dog loved the thing for which he had been bred, and he merely laughed at his antics.

Whenever Sam went to the village for supplies, new hope came to Spunk's heart. Perhaps he would bring back the sled and the other dogs this time. He would run down the road and meet the boy, and when he saw that Sam brought nothing more than a knapsack full of supplies, he would hide

his disappointment by leaping up on the boy and running around him.

But one night in early January Sam trudged up the ridge, returning from one of his trips to the village, and the dog failed to meet him at the accustomed place. Sam quickened his step, wondering what Spunk could be doing to make him forget this custom that had come to be almost a rite. He fully expected to see the dog rushing apologetically toward him before he reached the cabin. But Spunk did not appear. Sam decided he must have gone into the cabin and dropped off to sleep, but when he pushed open the door there was no dog there. He flung his knapsack down on the table, and went outside again. He called, but there was no response. He called again—and again—and again. No Spunk.

All sorts of fears crowded into Sam's brain, but he refused to harbor them. He told himself that the dog had merely gone on a longer romp through the woods than usual, and would return presently. He went inside to wait. He tried to go about his work, but found his mind could not be concentrated on it. He sat down and fidgeted

in a chair—fifteen minutes—half an hour—an hour. Sam thought it was nearer a hundred years.

Gradually he gave up hope of seeing Spunk rush in, and began to formulate a theory to explain his disappearance. Spunk would not willfully run away from him. He knew that. He might have been hurt—or—killed. But that was unlikely. Spunk knew how to take care of himself in the woods. No, the most probable explanation was the one he had been trying not to face—Jacques. He had always known that sometime his enemy would strike. The more he thought of it, the more he became convinced that his fears were well grounded, and that the blow had come.

Sam seized his cap and turned again towards the village. He ran most of the three miles, and walked rapidly when his breath came too short. But when he reached the village, he did not know where to turn. He walked the length of the main street and back again, trying to decide on a course of action. At last he asked a corner loafer if he had seen Jacques Thebault. The man showed his surprise at being addressed by the

taciturn Hermit's son, but managed to jerk his thumb in the direction of the barber shop.

"Playing pool," he explained.

Sam bolted across the street and into the pool room in the back part of the barber shop. The loafers sitting around the room gaped at him, and the players held their cues in mid-air in their surprise. Jacques alone betrayed no surprise. He glanced at the boy leisurely, and then turned back to the table and continued to play. Sam walked over to him.

"What have you done with my dog?" he demanded.

"W'at I'm do wit' your dog?" he repeated in mocking tones. Then becoming his natural, snarling self: "You don' own no dog. Me, I'm do w'at I like wit' my own dog."

Sam then knew that his suspicions were well founded. Jacques had claimed the dog that he had left to die. His anger nearly overcame him.

"I want that dog," he yelled.

Jacques responded with a string of curses, and the loafers laughed, enjoying the spectacle.

For a moment Sam considered leaping at the neck of the Frenchman, but his better judgment held him back. Yet his rage made him speechless.

Jacques leered at him. "You want to buy one good dog, maybe?" he asked, again mocking. "These dog w'at I sell, she's been hurt pretty bad but she's one good dog again now."

"How much?" asked Sam, grasping at the straw of hope.

"Ah, m'sieu, I'm vaire, vaire fond of these dog. I'm not sell him to anybody but you, but I'm know you treat him good, yes?"

"How much?"

"To you, m'sieu, oh, maybe a hundred and fifty dollar."

The loafers roared at the Frenchman's drollery.

"I'll get him, and I won't pay you a hundred and fifty dollars for him, either," shouted Sam. He ran out the door, tears of anger in his eyes, and his ears ringing with the taunts of the pool-room gang.

One hope remained for him. He would see Judge Baldwin and ask him to make Jacques give Spunk back. He hastened to

the courtroom and found the judge sitting in his usual owl-like dignity behind the desk, alone. In faltering words Sam explained the situation. The judge listened gravely. Then he shook his head.

"You will remember, young man, that I told you there was nothing legal about your taking the dog," he said. "Under the law the dog belongs to Jacques. There is nothing I can do about it. You had better run along home and forget the whole affair."

"Forget it!" repeated the boy. "Why, I—I—I—" His voice choked up, and he turned and ran out of the room.

A hundred and fifty dollars—it was almost all he had saved for college. Which would it be, Spunk or college? Sam knew which it would be. He hurried back to the cabin, retrieved the roll of bills from the coffee can on the shelf and hurried back to the village again. But the barber shop was closed up, and there was nobody inside. He looked in every store, and asked a dozen people if they had seen Jacques, but without success. Hour after hour, all evening long, he wandered through the village streets, but Jacques was not to be found. Lights began

to go out, and the streets became deserted. Then he saw one solitary figure up the street. He hurried to overtake him, but it was only Horace Simpson, the old constable. Sam asked him the question he had been repeating all that night.

"Jacques?" said the constable. "Wa'l, he was here a spell back, but I think he went back across the woods 'long abaout supper-time. What d'ye want him for, anyhow, and what ye doin' daown here this time-er-night?"

Sam did not answer. He turned and trudged slowly homeward.

CHAPTER VI

BACK TO BONDAGE

JACQUES had not returned across the woods that night, but was staying over night at the home of some friends in a secluded part of the village. It was there he had taken Spunk for safe keeping until morning.

He had heard for several weeks that his old dog had made a remarkable recovery from his injuries, and in his cunning mind he had carefully planned the kidnapping. He reasoned that by taking the dog he would get his revenge on the Hermit's son for interfering with him, and, at the same time, get back a good lead dog for the winter's races and for other work to which he put his dog team.

He had come to the village and waited until he saw Sam buying supplies in one of the stores. Then he had hurried to the cabin. Spunk, seeing him, had growled ferociously,

but Jacques knew dogs—or, at least, knew how to make them do his will—and the growling had not intimidated him. He had slipped a rope around the dog's neck, and with the aid of a stout club he had dragged him over a back road to the home of his friends in the village.

In the morning he prepared to return to his home across the ten-mile woods with Spunk. The weather looked threatening, and he started out at a brisk walk, hoping to get home before the storm. He carried no club this morning, having the weight of a well-filled knapsack on his back, but he jerked Spunk along at the end of the rope.

Spunk did not go willingly. There had been a time when he had obeyed every command given him by this man, knowing that to fail was to bring punishment on himself. Furthermore, he had known no other master in those days. This man had brought him up from a puppy. He had taken his abuse as the natural thing, and had tried to avoid it by obeying orders. But that was long ago. Since then he had lived with a new master, and had learned that abuse was not necessarily the common fate of dogs.

Some such thoughts as these went through his head as Jacques yanked and pulled him along this morning. More and more he determined to get away from this man who was taking him back to an unhappy existence, and to return to the boy who had been his friend and pal.

He held back on the rope, and Jacques gave it another angry jerk. Spunk responded to the jerk with a rush, and leaped with his whole weight at the man. But Jacques easily dodged, and let him fall with all his force to the ground. The blanket of snow softened the fall, but even in spite of that it dazed him. Jacques followed up with a sharp kick in the ribs, and yanked him to his feet.

They proceeded on their way, but Spunk was not yet beaten. He tried it again and again, but always with the same result. The man was too agile for him. He varied his tactics, and tried to harass Jacques by snapping at his ankles, but this was as ineffective as the first method. Jacques merely met his snapping by drawing back his foot quickly and kicking him in the mouth and nose. Eventually he gave that up, and resorted

once more to his futile efforts to hold back. But the jerk of the tight rope around his neck always started him along again.

He tried mixing up the different methods of resistance, hoping to take the man by surprise, but Jacques always seemed to know just what was coming and was ready for him. It was no use.

Spunk followed along at the end of the rope, subdued. But his mind was by no means admitting defeat. Out-and-out resistance had failed, and the dog's natural cunning began to manifest itself. He would pretend to be beaten, and when the man was off his guard his chance to strike would come. So he held back on the rope no more, and he gave up his frenzied efforts to free himself. Instead, he plunged along as docile as a cow, but keeping a sharp watch out of the corner of his eye.

Jacques was not easily deceived, and he had no intention of being taken off his guard. He therefore continued to keep a close watch on the dog, though growing increasingly hopeful that the old habit of obedience was returning to him.

He also had another reason for watching

the dog. He was anxious to find out just how complete the recovery was. If the dog was really sound, he was a valuable dog to any driver. Jacques had never had a better leader. But if there was a trace of weakness, the dog would never be able to stand hard work and long runs in the harness. So Jacques watched him eagerly.

At the least symptom of lameness, he would have shot the dog on the spot, for he had no feeling toward dogs except as they helped him to make money, and he did not want to be burdened with any that were not useful to him. Furthermore, if he killed it, he would have his revenge on the Hermit's son.

But Spunk showed no signs of being a cripple. He plodded along mechanically now, but each paw went down firmly and carried its share of his weight. Jacques stopped and examined the dog's leg minutely. He ran his hand over it, and mumbled softly to himself. Then he continued, content. Spunk followed.

Jacques chuckled to himself as he thought of Spunk's vigorous efforts to break away from him.

"You t'ink you get away from Jacques, eh?" he said to the dog. "Mais, non, Jacques will not have it so. But Jacques is vaire glad you try to get away. It show that you are strong, vaire strong, and full of w'at you call—pep. Oh, oui, c'est bon."

The slightly-used trail over which they were travelling now was in the very midst of the ten-mile woods. They had left the village far behind. A thick scrub growth rose on either side of the trail, merging into the bigger trees further back.

Jacques stopped again, and looked around him furtively in every direction. He eyed the dog speculatively.

"You t'ink you know your master again now, my dog?" he said, his voice falling into the snarling tone most natural to it. "Maybe we better mak' you understan' real good. Oui, I t'ink we better show you now that Jacques, he is boss. Too long you have live with that son of the Hermit. It is not good. It mak' you t'ink you are boss. It mak' you forget how the club, it feel. You quiet now; you t'ink you be good. But maybe you forget to be good unless Jacques, he mak' you remember w'at happens to the dog w'en she

don' be good. Jacques, he give you jus' a little taste. It mak' you remember."

Spunk stood still while the man talked. Perhaps this was going to be his chance—the chance for which he had been waiting. Yet the tone of Jacques' voice was not reassuring. He watched Jacques intently.

Jacques took a big hunting knife from his pocket, and opened the blade. He looked into the scrub growth for a likely looking club to cut. His eye lit on a stout sapling, and he stepped into the bushes, with one hand shielding his eyes from the reflex movement of the bushes as he pushed through them, and with the other hand holding firmly to Spunk's rope.

Suddenly he uttered a piercing cry, released his hold on the rope and sank to his knees. The cry was followed by a string of oaths, as he tried to jerk his foot free from the fox trap into which he had stepped. But the jerks only brought excruciating pain, and he set about opening the trap with his hands to extricate his foot. He succeeded in getting free, and tried to get up and walk, but sank to the ground again with another cry of pain. His ankle was broken.

Spunk, at the first realization that he was free, had started to run, dragging the rope after him. But after a few steps he had stopped. He hardly knew why. Some instinct had stopped him; that was all. He listened to the sounds coming from Jacques' mouth. Something had happened to the man. That was not anger; it was distress indicated by that tone of voice.

Spunk stood quite still. He realized that Jacques was powerless—and that he was free. He wanted to run as fast as he could to the village, and then to the ridge and Sam. But he stood quite still.

Jacques was trying to pull himself out to the trail. He managed it, painfully. There he rested.

Spunk drew a little closer to the man. He circled around him, still keeping a safe distance lest he be caught by some subterfuge. His observations assured him that this was no subterfuge. The man was in trouble. There was no mistaking that.

Then what was to be done? Here was the moment he had waited for, and he was not taking advantage of it. This man had never been kind to him. He had, indeed, been

cruel to him many times. But, after all, he was a man and he was in trouble. More than that, he had once been his master. Could he leave him here in the wilderness, helpless and alone?

The man dragged himself to his feet and tried to walk, but after a few steps he dropped again groaning. Spunk stood and watched him, still troubled in his mind; still undecided. The man paid no attention to the dog now. He was wholly occupied by his troubles. He tried to walk again. He tried to crawl. It was useless. With a cry of complete, utter despair he settled down in the snow.

The dog turned and began to run as fast as he could in the direction of the village. The rope dangled behind him.

"Run away, you," yelled Jacques, nearly mad with despair. "I'm feex you yet."

Spunk ran straight on, without a backward glance.

Jacques began to shout for help, knowing all the while that there was nobody to hear him.

CHAPTER VII

A MAN IN DISTRESS

SAM had hardly closed his eyes after getting home from his vain search for Jacques in the village. All night long he had lain on his bunk, fully dressed, with the money still in his pocket. The cabin had been like a dungeon to him, for once more he was its sole occupant. The feeling of emptiness which had possessed him before Spunk came into his life was back upon him.

So he tossed restlessly and sleeplessly all night long, waiting for the dawn. When it came he arose and mechanically set about getting himself some breakfast. He stopped when he suddenly realized that he was mixing up Spunk's morning porridge. He knew he would be unable to eat, anyway. Yet he must not allow himself to become weak, because he was going to find Jacques to-day. He must.

He doused his head and face with cold

water, and again turned to his kitchen table. He made some coffee, forced himself to drink it, and then went out of the cabin. He walked through the woods, trying to collect his thoughts. He came to the river and sat down on a gnarled tree-trunk which he had often used as a bench. He leaned his head in his hands. A soft breeze whispered through the trees, soothingly, and there the sleep that had evaded him all through the night came to him.

He slept for nearly three hours, his head nodding on his breast. Then he awoke with a start, and all his anxiety came back upon him. He arose and started to walk down to the village again. He went at once to the pool room where he had found Jacques the day before, and demanded to know if any of the men there had seen him to-day.

"He went home yesterday," said one of the men.

Sam went out and started for the ten-mile woods.

He knew the trail leading out to Jacques' place, having been over it on hikes with his father. He had hardly started to follow it before he noticed the fresh tracks in the

snow—man tracks and dog tracks. He quickened his step.

But he was only beginning to penetrate the woods when Spunk flashed into his sight, running towards him and still dragging the rope which Jacques had placed around his neck.

"Spunk," cried the boy, and his voice echoed happily through the woods.

The dog ran and leaped up on him, planting his forepaws on the boy's chest.

"You got away from him, Spunk! Good dog; good old boy." Sam was too happy at the unexpected reunion to give any thought to what further complications it might bring. He fairly hugged the dog in his joy.

It was Spunk who brought the demonstration of affection to an end. He dropped down on all four feet, backed away from Sam, and began to run around in the trail. He ran up the road a few steps, in the direction from which he had come, and then turned around and ran back to Sam. He repeated this activity again and again, while Sam watched him laughing.

"You are happy, aren't you, old fellow?" said the boy. "But you had better cut out

the scampering and come along home before that low-down dog-beater comes back after you again."

Sam turned and started back towards the village, determined to get the dog home first and then return to try to effect a reasonable settlement with Jacques. Having the dog in his possession, he argued to himself, might make a difference in the amount of money Jacques would be content to receive for him. But more important than the money part of it would be the knowledge that for the present, at least, Spunk was safely out of Jacques' power—and he would take good care to keep him out.

He realized as he walked along, thinking, that Spunk was not by his side. He turned around, and saw the dog standing stock still in the middle of the trail where they had met. He called, but Spunk made no move to follow him. Instead he barked.

"Come on; come on," yelled Sam. "Do you want to let Jacques catch you again? Come on."

But still the dog stood in his tracks. And again he barked. He was looking straight at Sam, so the boy knew that he was not

barking at some mysterious thing in the woods. He seemed merely to be indicating a stubborn refusal to follow. Sam could not understand it. The dog had never balked at his call before.

Rather petulantly he went back to the dog. "What's the idea of this?" he demanded. "What do you want?"

For answer, Spunk again ran a few quick steps in the direction from which he had appeared. Then he stopped, looked back at Sam, and barked again.

"Are you crazy?" pleaded the boy. "Don't you know that if Jacques gets his hands on you now, after you have run away from him, he will beat the daylight out of you? Let's quit the foolishness and get home in a hurry."

Again he started walking towards the village, but again the dog refused to stir. Sam stopped, and Spunk ran to him, leaped up on him again, then dropped back to the ground and ran back again. This time he ran to the very bend of the trail around which he had first appeared. There he stopped, barking again.

"Something funny about this," mused

Sam to himself. "I wonder—." Now he stood still, scratching his head in perplexity, and the dog trotted around the bend out of sight. Sam could still hear him barking. He trotted back into sight again, looked at Sam, and once more disappeared around the bend.

Sam made a decision. He realized now that Spunk was trying to lead him somewhere. Something was wrong. There seemed nothing to do but follow the dog. It might lead to trouble with Jacques—very likely would—but Spunk appeared determined, and he would trust the dog's judgment.

He started after the animal.

Having accomplished his purpose, Spunk kept a good lead on the boy. Sam walked fast, but Spunk alternately ran and walked, waiting impatiently when he found himself too far ahead. In this manner they hurried on through the dense woods. Several times Sam stopped and pretended to turn back, to see if the dog would change his mind, but each time the dog remained fixed in his purpose and Sam followed him.

As they walked Sam grew more and more

curious to know where the dog was leading him, and more and more anxious over the outcome of the journey. The sun was sinking lower in the sky, and they were getting farther and farther from home—into the very heart of the woods.

Somewhere ahead of him he heard Spunk barking with renewed vigor. The dog had disappeared around a curve and he could not see him. He broke into a run, and as he ran he heard a man's voice—Jacques' voice. He ran faster, alarmed.

The sight of Jacques dispelled his fears that Spunk had fallen into danger again. The man was sprawled out on the snow, his rat-like face screwed up in a horrible grimace of pain. With the aid of a stick he had limped, hopped, and crawled nearly two miles nearer home since Spunk had left him, but the exertion had cost him dearly in suffering. He had just about given up hope when the dog returned.

His face lit up with new hope when he saw Sam. Yet a shadow passed over it as he remembered that Sam was his enemy and that he was powerless. If the circumstances had been reversed he knew he would have

heaped torture on the head of the boy. He tried to summon up a look of friendliness on that face that was accustomed to a snarl. The result, as he looked up at Sam, was a pathetic leer.

"Help me. Please, please help me. I'm can't do not'ing; I'm die," he wailed.

"What happened?" Sam demanded, looking down at him.

"I'm break my leg; I'm die. Please help me."

"Where is it broken?"

Jacques pointed to his ankle, moaning.

Sam knelt to examine the injured member. He took out his hunting knife and slit Jacques' boot. Then he rolled down the woolen sock, and ran his hand over the broken ankle.

"How did you do it?" he asked.

"I'm step into a trap—oh, please do somet'ing to help me. I give you those dog if you help me."

No other thought but to help him had come into Sam's head, but this offer made him realize that Jacques, in his extremity, feared other treatment from him. He pretended to weigh the matter in his mind,

while Jacques continued his frantic plea for help.

"You will give me the dog?" he said at last.

"Oui, oui, I'm give him to you—anyt'ing."

"You won't come and steal him again?"

"Oh, no, no. You help me; I'm give him to you."

"H'mm," said Sam.

"Please, m'sieu, I'm can't do not'ing. Help me."

"All right," said Sam. "It's a bargain."

He looked again at the injured ankle. He gave it a preliminary jerk to see if he would be able to set the broken bone together, but Jacques drew back his leg and yelled like a baby.

"No, no, don't do that," he yelled. "Tak' me home."

Sam rolled the sock back over the broken ankle.

"Very well," he said.

He stood up and glanced around him. The sun was getting lower and they were still six or seven miles from Jacques' house. Yet they were a good ten miles from the village. There were no nearer houses. There was

nothing to do, he decided, but try to get Jacques home.

"See if you can get along with me helping you," he said to Jacques.

Jacques struggled to stand up, and Sam took him around the shoulders, supporting him. But it was too much agony, and Jacques did not have the grit to stand it for any length of time.

"Let me down," he pleaded.

Sam tried to carry him on his back, but even then the Frenchman's injured leg bumped or dragged, and again he pleaded to be set down on the ground.

"Well, how am I going to get you home, then?" demanded Sam.

"Oh, I'm don' know. I t'ink I'm die."

"Don't be a spleeny fool," said Sam, getting exasperated.

Jacques groaned.

The sun was dropping behind the heavy clouds on the horizon. Sam watched it and then looked back at Jacques, meaningly. Jacques nodded disconsolately and groaned again.

Suddenly Jacques sat up. "I tell you w'at I'm t'ink," he said. "Maybe you could

go to my house and get those dog team. I wait for you here."

"But it is getting dark, and there is a storm coming up," objected Sam. "You can't stay here in a storm."

"W'at else is to do?"

What else, indeed? Sam saw no other way out of the difficulty. He thought they could have made it all right if Jacques had only shown a little courage, but now they were up against it.

"Well, all right," he said.

He looked again at the threatening sky, and decided that the best thing to do was to fix up a makeshift shelter for Jacques. He suggested this to the Frenchman, who approved effusively. Sam then took out his knife and set about his task. He had often built shelters in the woods when on hiking trips with his father, and knew just how to go about it. He cut his poles the desired lengths, and drove them through the snow into the frozen ground. Then he shaped his lean-to systematically, arranged cross-poles on the top, and cut boughs for the roof. When it was complete he cut more fir boughs for a bed, and assisted the injured man in-

side. Just outside the opening he built a fire, taking pains to prevent it from spreading, and cut a pile of wood for Jacques to use in keeping the fire going.

Jacques watched him, surprised at all this attention. He could not understand the spirit that would prompt a man to be so solicitous of the comfort and welfare of his enemy.

"You all right now?" asked the boy.

Jacques nodded.

"I don't know how long it will take to get back," Sam said.

Jacques shrugged.

Sam called to Spunk, who was dozing by the newly-lighted fire. The dog arose and stretched himself, looking inquiringly at the boy. He saw no reason for leaving that comfortable fire at this time of night unless, perhaps, they were going for something to eat. Sam fathomed his thoughts, and threw him a hunk of beef which he had brought in his pocket. Spunk ate it, and was more puzzled than ever, but he followed, trusting Sam.

"We'll be back sometime," Sam called to Jacques.

"Be sure. I'm give you those dog," the man whimpered. He was wondering whether Sam would not just leave him there now, and fail to come back. That is what he would have done.

Sam and Spunk disappeared in the deep darkness of the woods.

CHAPTER VIII

LOST

IT was pitch dark. Sam thought to himself that it was a good thing he had been through these woods before and knew his way about. It would be an easy thing to go astray on a night like this.

The great trees loomed on either side of the narrow, ill-defined trail like great black ghosts. The rising wind whistled through their tops and made them seem to be sneering at the insignificance of these petty creatures—this boy and this dog—tramping along beneath them.

Sam had no fear of the woods. He loved the magnificent solitude of them. His uncompanionable soul was most content at such a time as this. The thousands and thousands of great trees all around him seemed to defy the troublesome outside world to penetrate the fastnesses of the forest. And the wind and the darkness added a mysticism which

somehow made the boy feel exalted. It was all like a happy, peaceful dream.

And so he trudged along, keenly conscious of the vast forest around him, but his mind only half attentive to his immediate surroundings. He was like a mariner who is so rapt in the splendor of the limitless sea that he pays little heed to this particular wave or that, through which his ship is plowing.

Spunk walked close at his heels. He, too, was a lover of the forest, particularly when, as now, the earth was blanketed with a soft carpet of snow. The feel of the cool snow on his feet, the smell of the sweet forest in his nostrils, and the comfortable knowledge that this boy-pal of his was at his side—that was happiness supreme. It was almost enough to make him forget the happiness of leading a well-disciplined team over hill and down dale through the snow.

They walked silently. Sam's mood was too exalted for words. The human voice would have been out of harmony with the whistling and moaning of the wind and the crunch-crunching of his mocassined feet on the snow. Those sounds seemed to blend

into the stillness of the forest, whereas a human voice would have disturbed that stillness. Now and then a dead limb would be blown down somewhere out there in the woods, and the crash would reverberate like an explosion. But this, too, was in harmony with the environment, like the booming of a drum to punctuate a musical composition.

Sam almost forgot the injured man back there in the lean-to, but his mind was brought sharply back to him by the falling of a soft snowflake on his cheek. He turned his face upward to make sure that this came out of the heavens and not from a tree-top. Several more flakes fell on his cheeks, turning into dewy drops of water as they landed. Yes, it was snowing—there was no question about that. It was lucky he had built that shelter. He hoped Jacques would be able to keep the fire burning.

But why had he taken so much interest in this man? It had never occurred to him to do otherwise, but he was at a loss to explain his instincts. In fact, he did not know much about instincts. He had thought that a life was guided by policies of the mind—that one deliberately decided what one's conduct

would be according to certain predetermined rules.

And there was Spunk, too. The same instinct must have prompted him to lead Sam back there. Spunk had even more cause to hate Jacques than he did, but he had refused to leave him in distress. Why? Sam tried to imagine how his father would have answered these questions—his father, who had taught him to distrust his instincts, and to live by hard-and-fast rules of conduct. Yet, as he walked through this great forest, he was glad he had followed his instincts. He was glad he had undertaken to help Jacques, and glad Spunk had done his share. Perhaps he was letting Spunk supplant his father as his instructor in the philosophy of life.

The storm was becoming more and more severe. The snow began to sift out of the clouds like chaff from a fanning-mill. The flakes seemed to crowd each other in their descent. The wind became a gale, driving the snow before it in great gusts.

Sam found it necessary to detach himself from his musings and pay strict attention to watching where he was going. The snow

beat upon his face and into his eyes. The thick curtain of falling snow all around him took away what little power he had for seeing through the darkness. He let his feet guide him along the trail, using his outstretched hands to tell him when he was coming up against a tree or a clump of bushes.

Spunk kept his position at Sam's heels, seeming rather pleased than otherwise at the storm. As some race horses are spoken of as "mud hens," because of their ability to plow through muddy going, so Spunk was a "snow hen," if the term may be allowed. Instead of slowing him up, storms seemed to put new vigor into him.

So the boy and the dog plugged along through the storm, stopping every now and then while Sam made sure of his ground by feeling for the bushes at the sides of the trail and by trying to peer ahead through the darkness. On one of these occasions he stopped longer than usual. There seemed to be a fork in the trail, or, at least, two openings of about equal width among the trees. There was just enough snow on the ground so that it was impossible to tell by the feeling underfoot which was the beaten trail.

Sam tried to remember where the extra trail—if it was one—might lead, but he could not recall ever having seen it on his tramps through the woods. He tried to figure out the approximate direction of Jacques' house. It was almost straight ahead, he thought. One of these trails seemed to bear off to the left. The other bore to the right, but not so sharply. He would take that one, he decided.

He started again, but Spunk had started down the left-hand trail. Sam yelled to him, and the dog came back. But when Sam started to follow the right-hand trail, Spunk held back.

"Come on, Spunk," Sam shouted. "This is the right one. It must be."

Spunk caught up with him, but stopped, barking. He turned as if to retrace his steps.

"You seem to think I'm on the wrong track, but I don't think so," said Sam. "Come on."

Spunk still held back, but when Sam kept on going he followed, though his manner clearly indicated that he much preferred to go the other way. Sam laughed at him.

It was not long before Sam began to have his own doubts, however. The trail seemed

to be getting narrower and the bushes more numerous and thicker. He had come so far, though, so he decided to give it a thorough test before turning back. He kept on going until he realized that he was no longer in a wagon trail at all, but in a footpath.

He turned back. Spunk followed behind, as though to say he had not the slightest idea where the boy was going, but he would follow him anyway. Sam stepped faster, anxious now to get back into the other trail. It seemed much farther going back than it had coming in. He was still in the footpath when he thought he should be back at the fork.

He brushed the melting snow from his eyelids with the hand he had been using to feel his way along the path. Before he could get the hand out in front of him again, he had walked into a clump of bushes. He stepped back out of the bushes and felt for the opening in front of him, but only encountered more bushes. The path had come to an end.

He tried to go back as he had come, realizing that he had wandered off into a new path. But now he could not even find any-

thing resembling a path. He must have mistaken a natural opening among the trees and bushes for a path. He stopped in his tracks, trying to decide which way to turn. Spunk began to move around him restlessly.

Sam groped around in the darkness, but with every step he only became the more confused. And he had thought himself at home in the woods! He was not alarmed, although he realized now that he was lost, but he was thoroughly disgusted with himself and humiliated. He stumbled around blindly, hoping to find the trail by luck. But he knew that he was losing himself more completely with every turn.

Spunk had abandoned his quiet determination to let the boy go where he pleased, and was now circling around him and barking. He would run off into the woods in one direction, then return and run in another direction, evidently, like Sam, trying to find the way out of the wilderness.

Sam sat down on a fallen tree-trunk to think it out. He knew he could find his way out some way in the daylight, but what of the storm in the meantime? He could not sit there all night, or, at least, he did not

fancy it. And if it continued to snow like this, travelling in the morning would be next to impossible without snowshoes.

And what of Jacques? He would be all right to-night, with the shelter and the fire, but there was no telling what would happen to him if he were left there longer than that, with no food and with his broken ankle still unset.

Spunk had returned to Sam's side, and now he was looking up into the boy's face and barking. In fact the barking had almost come to be a habit.

"Well?" said Sam, looking at the dog.

By way of answer Spunk put his nose to the ground and began to trot slowly through the woods.

"Back-tracking," Sam ejaculated. He rose hastily. "I believe he can do it, at that, if we can get out before the snow has covered the scent."

He followed the dog at a trot. Several times he bumped his shins against stumps and scratched his face with the bushes, but he kept on. Sam was astonished at the twists and turns in the route over which the dog led him. He had not realized that he

was making such crooked progress when he had come over it in the other direction.

They came after a bit to a place where Spunk turned at right angles. The walking grew better. This was really a path, Sam knew. He thought it must be the one he had first followed against Spunk's advice. Soon it widened, and he knew he had guessed right. They were now on the "extra trail."

"And what a fine trail you turned out to be," muttered Sam.

They came to the fork where they had first wandered off the main trail, and Spunk stopped. He had done his part, and now he waited for Sam's next move.

"We will go your way now," said Sam.

Ten minutes later they were emerging from the woods. Just up on the next hill was the lonely building which had once been a farmhouse but which was now the rather dilapidated home of Jacques Thebault. To Spunk this house had once been home, and with a dog's instinct for home—old or new—he left Sam at the foot of the hill and hurried ahead of him to the house.

Sam heard him barking outside the door. A chorus of answering barks responded.

CHAPTER IX

THE DOG TEAM

"JACQUES!"

The name was called softly in a feminine voice, with a clear French pronunciation which clipped it very short at the end.

Sam, standing beside Spunk out there in the storm, scanned the dark outline of the house, trying to locate the person who was calling. It would be Jacques' wife, he knew, and he must make her understand that he was not Jacques without frightening her so much that she would barricade herself inside before he had explained his mission.

She called again, softly: "Jacques."

The voice came from above, and Sam tried to peer through the snow at the second-story windows. He could see nothing. He aimed his voice in the general direction from which her voice had come.

"Mrs. Thebault," he called, "Jacques sent me for his dogs."

A window descended with a bang. That

was the only answer. Spunk launched a new campaign of barking, and again the answering barks came from inside the barn. Sam felt for the door of the house, and, finding it, rapped loudly. Above the tumult of the dogs he could just hear the upstairs window of the old house slide cautiously open again.

Sam waited for Mrs. Thebault's voice. Presently it came, but she spoke in rapid French, and it sounded to Sam like corn popping. His father had taught him the rudiments of French along with his other studies, but he found himself wholly unequal to this outburst. Not a word of it could he understand, although he judged from the inflection of the voice that Mrs. Thebault was asking him questions.

"Jacques is hurt. He sent me for his dogs," he said, very slowly and distinctly, hoping she would be able to understand the simple English words.

"Je ne comprends pas," she said. Then once more she spoke quickly, excitedly in her own tongue.

All Sam could catch was the word "Jacques" every now and then. She had evi-

dently understood that word, too, when he was talking to her.

"Attendez," said Sam, remembering the word for "wait," and trying to recall enough more of his French to phrase an explanatory sentence. "Votre—votre—" What was the word for "husband?" Well, "man" would do. "Votre homme est—" "Hurt?" What was "hurt?" "Malade?" No, that was "sick." That would do. "Votre homme est malade."

"Malade?" Poppety-pop-pop. She was off on another stream of rapid-fire French. Sam tried to phrase his next sentence while she talked. But she did not wait. The window slammed down again, and in a few minutes she came to the door, showing signs of having dressed rapidly.

Sam was racking his brain to remember the word for "dog," so he could explain his mission further. Spunk took advantage of Sam's stuttering delay to greet his old mistress. She petted the dog timidly, glancing sidelong at Sam as though expecting to be rebuked for her act. Without waiting for further halting French from Sam, she pulled a shawl over her head and led the

way to the barn with a lighted lantern. Inside the barn, Spunk quickly made himself comfortable on a pile of straw and went off to sleep without further formality.

The woman turned to Sam. He had given up groping for that elusive word, and determined to make her understand by signs

"Jacques—down there." He pointed in the direction of the woods. "Ankle broken." He pointed to his own ankle and held it limp. "Can't walk." He pretended to be fatigued after limping a few steps. "I get him." He pointed to himself. "With the dog team." He pointed to the sled and the dogs.

Jacques' wife nodded her head to show that she understood. She looked out into the storm and the darkness and then looked inquiringly at Sam. He understood her question and shook his head. He would not try to go in the night. He cradled his head in his hands to indicate that he would sleep first.

The woman became voluble once more, and Sam gathered that she was asking him some question or other. He again caught Jacques' name in her speech. Undoubtedly

she was asking him if Jacques would be all right—if he was sheltered from the storm.

"Jacques, il est com-*fort*-able," he said, giving the word as much French accent as he could manage.

The woman, satisfied, led him back to the house, lit a kerosene lamp, and showed him to a bedroom. Sam thanked her with a "merci," and she went away. Presently the boy was sound asleep.

It seemed that he had just dropped off to sleep when he was aroused by a rap at the door. He rubbed his eyes, arose, dressed, and went out to the kitchen, where Mrs. Thebault had bacon and eggs waiting for him. She looked fresh and neat in the daylight, as she bustled around the kitchen waiting on the boy. Sam found himself liking her, even though she was Jacques' wife. Perhaps it was the little frightened look that seemed to be always in her eyes which attracted him. She did not try to talk this morning, nor did he.

After breakfast they went to the barn where Sam found the dogs eating their morning meal. Mrs. Thebault walked among them, patting this one and that one

on the head. She got out the harness, and Sam turned the sled around. Together they straightened out the harness in front of it.

The dogs had finished eating, and the woman spoke to them. Each one knew his rightful place, and they formed in front of the sled like a squad of soldiers, waiting to be fastened into the harness. With them was Spunk. Sam had been scratching his head and talking to him when the woman spoke, but he had quickly turned and trotted to the lead position. It was as though he had never been away, out of all this.

But he had been away, and his place as lead dog had been filled. And now, as he trotted to his old place, he found a usurper also waiting—a dog that had formerly been under his leadership. He growled at the pretender, asserting his old authority, but promotion is not so easily retracted. The other dog—Garçon, his name was—stood his ground. The light of conflict appeared in two pairs of eyes.

"Spunk," Sam called, and for a minute the dog turned, undecided. Then he turned back. This was too serious a matter to be thus given up, even though Sam wanted it so.

"Garçon," said Mrs. Thebault, but Garçon also refused to budge.

She seized Garçon, and with what Sam though was unusual strength for such a small woman, dragged him back nearer the sled. She motioned to Sam to come and hold him, and while he did so she unhitched one of the wheel dogs and hitched Garçon in its place. Sam, at a sign from her, hitched Spunk into the lead position, noticing with wonder the responsive sparkle in the dog's eyes.

Sam took his place behind the sled, and Mrs. Thebault threw open the door and stepped aside.

"Mush," cried Sam, and the dogs leaped forward.

Driving a dog team! Sam had done it so many times in his imagination that he felt like a veteran, but that did not detract from the thrill of the actuality. Now he rode on the runners and now he ran behind the sled, talking to the dogs, using the words that he had heard Henri use to make them do his bidding. The white, glistening snow seemed to be sliding backwards from under the runners as they trekked on. The sparkling air

filled his whole being. He had never felt more alive.

To Spunk it was a paradise regained. This was his life, and with all his happiness in those days with Sam he had missed this thing, as a boy, eating cookies in the pantry of a kindly aunt, misses the ball game in the back lot.

The storm had ceased, but not before it had left nearly a foot of fresh snow on the ground. This had been blown about in great drifts, and now and then the dogs would encounter banks of snow through which it required all their strength to make their way. Then again they would come to a stretch where the wind had swept the snow away, and then they would settle down to a brisk trot. Sam rode when the going was smooth, and waded behind when they struck the hard travelling.

As soon as they were within the woods they found the sledding better. The trees had stopped a large part of the snow before it ever reached the ground, and just enough had sifted through to provide a soft carpet for the feet of the dogs and a smooth expanse for the sled runners. The trees, which

last night had seemed great black ghosts, were now garlanded with white festoons. Their whole tone had been reversed, softened, by the magic touch of the snow.

The trail, which had been so hard to follow last night, was plainly marked this morning, even though the snow had covered all its tracks. Sam wondered how he could have wandered away from it. When he came to the fork where he had gone astray, he stopped the dogs a minute while he marked the place firmly in his memory. Yes, it looked like a fork, sure enough. But another time he would know that the right-hand trail led only into a blind. He spoke to the dogs, and again Spunk led them on their way.

He found Jacques apparently comfortable in the shelter. The fire was still smouldering in spite of the snow that had fallen on it. He gave Jacques some sandwiches that his wife had sent, and the man ate ravenously. Having finished, he looked at the waiting dog team.

"Why that Garçon not lead those team?" he demanded.

"My dog wanted the job," replied Sam,

placing the emphasis on the possessive pronoun.

"You change it," ordered Jacques, in a surly voice.

"I'm driving this team to-day," replied the boy, shortly.

Jacques glowered, but offered no further protests.

Sam assisted him to the sled, and he sank down on it with a groan. For a strong man, he was doing a lot of groaning, Sam reflected. Sam grasped the steering bars and shouted to the dogs. They started.

"Hey!" yelled Jacques. "Where you t'ink you going?"

"To the village, of course," said Sam.

Jacques cursed at him. "Tak' me home," he ordered.

"But you have a broken ankle that must be set. You must go to a doctor and have it attended to at once."

"Tak' me home. Then go get those doctor. I don' go to that village."

Sam stopped the team, and argued, but Jacques was adamant. He did not want to go to the village. He had reasons for it. He wanted to go home. He must go home.

"All right," said Sam, at last. "You win. Be it on your own head."

He turned the team, and drove in the other direction.

The pulling was harder with Jacques on the sled. The dogs plugged along at their best gait, but it took more strength. Sam only rode when his legs became too tired from carrying him through the snow. Spunk, head in the air, was still stepping along with the easy gait of one who gets a thrill from his work. Garçon, the deposed, was pulling heartily, determined to show his ability in spite of his demotion.

But Jacques made it a point never to be satisfied with his dogs. He had a theory that they could always do better if they were pushed. From his point of view it was the most natural thing in the world for dogs and men to do just as little as possible, to shirk whenever possible, and to exert themselves only when forced to do so. He made the mistake of judging others by himself.

So now he supplemented Sam's driving by shouting threats at this dog or that. Occasionally he advised Sam to run ahead and kick a little life into one of the dogs or an-

other. Sam, of course, disregarded his advice and made no answer.

"W'at you call that dog? Spunk?" he asked.

Sam nodded.

"Hey, you, Spunk!" he yelled. "W'at's the matter you? Mush along, or I feex you."

"He is going all right," said Sam.

"No good," muttered Jacques.

They were driving near the edge of the trail. Jacques reached his hand out over the side of the sled and grasped a loose stick that was protruding from the snow. Before Sam knew what he was doing, he raised the stick in the air and flung it at Spunk.

The stick landed on the dog's neck, sharp end first. Spunk leaped forward with surprise, pulling the other dogs after him. The sled jerked and turned over before Sam half realized what had happened. Jacques flew sprawling into the snow, cursing and groaning.

Sam helped him up silently, righted the sled, and helped him back into it. He straightened out the tangled harness, and returned to his position behind the sled.

"From now on," he said, "you keep still.

I will drive this team without any help from you. And if you throw anything more at my dog or any of the other dogs, I'll dump you out and leave you.

"Mush on."

CHAPTER X

DOING A FAVOR

MRS. THEBAULT was waiting in the yard when they drove in. Immediately there was an outburst from Jacques. He talked in French, with the same rapidity that his wife had done the night before, and Sam did not have the slightest idea what he was saying, but it was very evident that he was not playing the loving husband. The frightened look in his wife's eyes was more pronounced, Sam noticed.

She tried to speak once or twice, but Jacques stopped her with a gruff "Depeche tui," and continued to harangue. She fluttered around like a very frightened little bird. Sam had an idea that she would have cause to fear her husband if he had not been injured.

She and Sam lifted Jacques up from the sled and together they assisted him into the house. Sam unharnessed the dogs and gave

them some food while Jacques' wife ministered to her injured husband. When Sam went back into the house, Jacques was still snarling at his wife while she tried her best to make him comfortable.

Sam felt sorry for the woman. Jacques evidently treated her the same way he treated his dogs—very badly. And she, like the dogs, was doing the best she could to please him in spite of his cruel treatment. Sam had noticed her furtive fondness for the dogs; he recalled the way she had welcomed Spunk. He surmised that she had a fellow feeling for them. He could very well picture Jacques boxing her ears, though, if he caught her bestowing any affection on them. He suspected that Jacques went farther than boxing her ears, too, sometimes.

Jacques called to him: "The woman, she get you somet'ing to eat. Then you get those doctor, yes?"

"All right," said Sam.

Jacques' wife managed a scared sort of smile for him, and went about getting him some lunch.

"How is the doctor going to get in here?" asked Sam.

"Maybe you drive him in wit' those dog team, yes?" said Jacques, trying to make his voice appealing.

Sam thought this over. It would mean driving to the village, driving back with the doctor, driving him back to the village, then driving the team home again. Probably more trips would have to follow. Secretly he was pleased at this, thrilled at the thought of having the dog team under his direction all this time. But he decided to pretend reluctance. He wanted Jacques to feel under great obligations to him. It might come in handy later.

"Do you think I have nothing else to do but drive your dogs back and forth from the village?" he said. "You should have let me take you there in the first place."

"Please, m'sieu, you do this for me. I feex it right wit' you; I do anyt'ing for you." Jacques was very much worried.

Sam decided to let him worry a little. It would do him good. He went over to the table, where Mrs. Thebault had laid out a substantial lunch for him, and ate. Jacques' voice came intermittently from the couch, pleading. When he had finished the meal,

Sam arose and looked over at the humbled Frenchman.

"All right," he said.

Jacques sighed with relief at the decision. "You are one fine boy. By'm'by I do somet'ing gran' for you," he said.

"Remember that," said Sam, and went out.

Mrs. Thebault again helped him harness the dogs. She saw now that he felt toward them as she did, and she petted them quite frankly. She was particularly affectionate with Spunk, and the dog retaliated by licking her fingers and wagging his tail. He liked her. Sam did, too, he realized. He was getting farther and farther away from those days when he had not liked anybody but his hermit father.

As he drove the team out of the barn, Jacques called to him from inside the house. He stopped the team. Mrs. Thebault held it for him while he went in to see what Jacques wanted.

"My frien'," said Jacques—Sam smiled to himself at the word—"will you do me the beeg favor?"

"Something else?" asked Sam.

"It is not'ing, but for me it is the beeg favor."

"Well, what is it?"

"In the barn is one box. It is some t'ing w'at belong to a frien' of mine in the village. You tak' it wit' you. It will be the beeg favor."

"Where do you want me to take it?"

"You tak' him to that pool room where you see me the other day. You geev him to Charlie Jones. By'm'by I feex it right wit' you."

"You say it is in the barn?" asked Sam.

"Oui, you find him right by the door."

Sam found it. It was a big wooden box that nearly filled the sled, but he carried it out and loaded it on.

"Bon jour," he said to Mrs. Thebault.

She opened her mouth to answer, but some timidity seemed to prevent her from speaking. She gave Spunk a farewell pat, and Sam gave the word to start. As he rode down the hill, he looked back and waved at her. She stood still, watching.

"Funny," thought Sam as he settled down to direct the team through the woods.

The first part of the trek was easy. The

two times over the trail in the morning had broken it out as far as the place where Jacques had spent the night, and the dogs trotted along at a good clip. After that point was reached, the speed was diminished, but even then the dogs broke trail through the woods with little difficulty.

Sam studied the dogs as they ran along. There were seven of them, all hitched double saved Spunk, who, as lead dog, ran ahead alone. Most of them were of the same general appearance as Spunk—big and rangy, medium-dark brown in color. Jacques had experimented with different breeds, and this one had been the most satisfactory. The right wheel dog—Garçon was at the left—was of a different build, more stocky than the others, and his coat was of a lighter texture. He had St. Bernard blood in him.

Sam did not know any of their names except Garçon's. When Mrs. Thebault had been talking to them he could not tell where names started and other words left off. To get around the difficulty he told off a name for each of them by the old formula of "Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief." Only when he came to "thief" he decided to skip

it, and passed on to "doctor, lawyer, —" and that was as far as he needed to go, as Garçon already had a name.

As he watched them he decided he had named them pretty well, too. Rich Man and Poor Man were running side by side just behind Spunk. Rich Man appeared to be the soul of pomposity. Now and then, when Spunk gave him a warning growl over his shoulder for some misstep, he was a picture of wounded vanity. But when everything was going well, he held his head high, well satisfied with himself and his place in the world.

Poor Man, beside him, pulled just as hard —indeed, there were no shirks on the team —but his mien was entirely different. When he looked over at Rich Man he seemed to be paying reverence to him. He bore himself humbly, as befits one of low station. At the least suggestion from Spunk he would strain every muscle. As they neared the end of the journey he was showing signs of great fatigue, for he did not know how to conserve his strength, but spent it all at the outset.

Beggar Man, Sam decided, could perhaps have been better named. Yet in one way

he justified the name: that was in personal appearance. He was by far the most unkempt of the dogs. His neglect in caring for his appearance, however, did not carry over to his work as a sled dog. He pulled steadily.

Doctor, pulling behind Poor Man and beside Beggar Man, was the least conspicuous member of the team. He was older than the others, and wise in the way of sled and dogs, but he went about his work unostentatiously and quietly, paying little attention to his team-mates. His dignity entitled him to his name.

Then there were the wheel dogs, Garçon and the stocky one that Sam called Lawyer. Garçon was sober enough at the loss of his position as leader, but the same spirit which had won that place for him made him an exceptional dog anywhere else in the team—the spirit of the true sled dog. He wanted that sled to keep moving, the faster the better, and was willing to put all he had into making it do so.

Lawyer had great strength, but was slower—like the course of justice sometimes is. In the drifts he was invaluable. There

seemed to be no drift so deep that he could not plod through it in his deliberate way, though on the long easy stretches he sometimes had all he could do to keep up with the other dogs, and he looked as though he disapproved of this childish haste.

Sam was thus chuckling to himself at the aptness of the names he had given out so haphazardly as they neared the village end of the woods.

"Only a little farther, boys," he yelled, tossing a handful of snow at Lawyer, who was in favor of slowing down.

He drove around a bend, and found his way blocked by a snowmobile, apparently stuck in the snow. A man whom he did not know was walking impatiently up and down beside the machine, and two other men were wielding shovels on the other side of it, where it was sunk in the gully.

The stranger looked up in surprise at the boy in the bright-colored clothes and at the dog team.

"Well, well," said he, "if it ain't Dangerous Dan McGrew."

The two men with the shovels straightened up, and Sam recognized one of them as his

old acquaintance, Horace Simpson, the constable. He started to turn his team out to pass the stalled snowmobile, but the stranger stepped in front of Spunk and blocked the way.

"Wait a minute," he said. "We ain't seen anybody from the Ar'tic for quite a spell and we're curious to know how things are going up there."

Horace and the other man, who was also a stranger to Sam, laughed immoderately at their companion's wit. Sam, anxious to be on his way, forced up a grin, though he characterized the man in his mind as a "smart aleck."

"Oh, things are all right," he said, and again tried to start the dogs.

"Now, now, don't be in such a hurry," said the man, again planting his huge bulk in front of the team. "Let's have a little chat about the North Country."

"I am going after a doctor," said Sam. "I have to get along."

"Who you going after a doctor for?"

"Jacques Thebault. He broke his ankle."

"That so?" said the man. "You a friend of this Thebault?"

"No—that is—I know him. Get out of the way, will you?"

But the stranger remained where he was. Sam tried to get the dogs around him, but he seized Spunk's harness and held on.

"Leave that dog alone. Get out of my way." Sam was getting angry.

The man turned to Horace. "Know this boy, Horace?"

"Yay-ah, I know him, Sheriff," drawled the constable. "He ain't much account."

"Is he in with Thebault?"

"Never suspected him of it before, Sheriff, but I dunno as I'd be much surprised."

The sheriff turned again to Sam. He still hung to Spunk's collar.

"Now then, my lad," he said, "what about this story of Jacques having a broken ankle."

"He has a broken ankle. I took him home and came back after the doctor. That's all I know about it."

"Maybe it is, and maybe it ain't," said the sheriff, significantly. "Horace, you and Gillis see what he's got in that sled."

Sam started. "The beeg favor!" What had Jacques been up to?

"All I have is a bundle Jacques asked me

to bring down to a friend of his," he said, but his heart sank.

Horace and the man named Gillis lifted the box from the sled and sat it down in the road. They obtained a hammer and screwdriver from the car and proceeded to pry off the cover.

"It's likker, all right, Sheriff," said Horace, lifting some cans from the box.

He took one of the cans to the sheriff, who opened it and sniffed the contents.

"Liquor is right," he said, "and bum liquor at that."

The men lifted the box into the back of the snowmobile, and Sam waited for further developments.

"Horace," said the sheriff, "I guess there's room for you where that liquor was. You ride in with the boy."

Then, looking at Sam: "You're under arrest," he said.

CHAPTER XI

HENRI DROPS HIS SMILE

SAM was stunned by the rapidity with which he had been transported from perfect happiness to absolute misery. He was again in the hands of the law—the law made by men, as it seemed to him, for the torture of such innocents as himself. Would they never leave him alone? Must he continue all his life to pay for deserting the tenets of the Hermit?

Yet he was not as bitter as on that first occasion of his fall into the clutches of the law. He had changed a great deal since then, and now he saw the law, as personified in the grizzled Horace, in a kindlier light. He did not think, as he had thought that other time, that he was being deliberately tortured in mind because these men—Horace and these others—delighted in seeing him suffer. He had learned much about human nature in the last few months, and he

knew now that Horace's gruff manner was a masque to hide the natural sympathy and kindliness of his old heart, as his whiskers hid the smile that lurked about his lips. He remembered Horace's description of a dog beater, and he liked him for it, even as the old man again laid his hand on his shoulder in token of his status as a prisoner.

So much had Sam changed that he did not regret the good deed which had brought him to his present downfall. The gratification of having saved the man who was the cause of all his troubles still surpassed the bitterness of his reward. He did not understand his feeling in the matter. Indeed, the old habits of thought came back upon him and he tried to argue with himself and to tell himself that he should have left Jacques to suffer in the woods—perhaps even to die. But in his heart he knew that if he had it all to do over again, he would save the man, even if he knew it would bring him into this trouble.

It was Spunk who had taught him this new philosophy—Spunk, who had himself risked further misery to save his old persecutor.

He looked at Spunk now, and the dog was shaking his head restlessly, anxious to be off for the last leg of the trek and the well-earned rest at its end. The sheriff no longer held him, but Sam still held the brakes down, awaiting word from his captors to be on the way.

Horace, settling himself comfortably on the sled, addressed the sheriff: "Shall I lock the boy up till you git thar, Sheriff?"

The sheriff nodded.

"What we goin' ter do with the dog team?" the constable asked.

The sheriff scratched his head.

"I think Henri Rousseau will take care of them," volunteered Sam.

"Yay-ah," said Horace, "I guess that's a good idea."

"Who's he?" asked the sheriff, who knew nothing of the world of dog teams.

Horace explained, and the sheriff approved the solution. Sam released the brakes, and the impatient Spunk was off at the head of the team. The snowmobile in which the sheriff and his party had optimistically started for Jacques' place had broken the trail out nicely as far as it had gone, and

the dogs made good time to the village. Sam drove straight to Henri's stable.

Henri was just emerging from the stable when they drove in. His perpetual grin gave way to a look of surprise as he saw his youthful protégé with a full team of dogs and a sled. For the moment he attached no significance to the presence of the constable, and he was so surprised at seeing the dogs that he missed the woeful look on the boy's face.

"W'at you do?" he cried, jubilantly. "Where my frien' get those dog team, and he not tell Henri, eh?"

The look of surprise grew more intense as he studied the dogs.

"Those other dog, she belong to that Jacques, is it not?" he asked.

Then, for the first time, he read the trouble in Sam's face.

"Somet'ing it is wrong. W'at is it?"

Horace rose lumberingly from the sled.

"I'm 'fraid the boy has got himself into some bad trouble this time," said he.

"Wait a minute," Sam interrupted. "I'll do my own explaining."

Briefly he told Henri what had happened,

beginning with the disappearance of Spunk and ending with his arrest out there at the edge of the woods. Henri listened gravely, the smile gone from his face.

"That Jacques, always he get me in trouble," he said.

"But you are in no trouble," said Sam.

"Ah, my frien', trouble for you, it is trouble for me."

Sam felt a lump in his throat at this expression of friendship.

"I'll be all right, Henri," he said.

"Don' you believe these boy?" Henri asked Horace.

"Wa'l, naow, I wun't say I do, and I wun't say I don't. But it don't make no dif'rence whuther I do or I don't. He was caught with likker, and that's pretty good evidence that he warn't up to no good." Horace disliked to commit himself, remembering the boy's vindication on the former charge against him.

Henri and Sam unharnessed the dogs, and Henri made beds for them in the stable. Spunk, with his unerring instinct for knowing when his young master was in trouble, spurned the offered bed and stuck close to

the boy's heels, and would have followed him out if Sam had not made him understand that he must stay behind. It did not satisfy him, however, and when the three men went away he remained scratching on the door and begging to be allowed to follow.

Horace led the way to the combination opera house and town hall. He did not take Sam to the lock-up, as the sheriff had directed, but led him into the selectman's office, where the three sat down to wait for the sheriff and his deputy to arrive. Presently they did so.

"Thought you might like to ask the boy some questions before he was locked up," Horace explained. He introduced Henri.

"I'm tell you you mak' the beeg mistake," said Henri. "This boy she hate that Jacques lak' poison. I know."

"I guess we didn't make any mistake," said the sheriff. Then, to Sam: "You'd better tell us all about this. It will go easier with you."

Sam told the sheriff everything that had happened, just as he had told it to Henri. The latter nodded gravely from time to time as the boy talked.

"All through?" asked the sheriff, as Sam stopped talking.

"Yes, that is all there is to tell."

"Well, start all over again now and tell us how you really happened to be hauling moonshine for this Thebault."

"I just told you."

"I want the truth—not a pretty little fairy tale," bellowed the sheriff. "We might be fairly easy on you if you would tell us the truth so we could get the goods on Thebault. But if you try to get out of it with that kind of a yarn I'll tell you right now that you are in for some trouble."

"That is the truth."

"Poppycock. How long have you been hauling liquor for him?"

Sam was on the point of making an angry reply, when Henri stopped him with a gesture.

"You don' believe this boy, m'sieu," said he, addressing the sheriff. "I know he tell the trut'. I know this Jacques. Ah, I know better as you t'ink."

"Well?"

"I grow up with this Jacques."

Sam looked at Henri in astonishment. He

had never heard this before. Was Henri trying to make up some story to help him? No, Henri was telling the truth. There was no mistaking the truth in his eyes. Truth and pain. This was not Happy Henri—this man whose eyes bespoke years of some silent anguish and whose voice was almost a sob. The shock of revelation left Sam speechless. What had Henri been keeping hid from the world behind that ever-present smile? What was he about to tear from his secret heart?

"No, no, Henri," he said, quickly, trying to shield his friend from the pain of talking about something that plainly hurt him to the quick. "Everything will be all right."

Henri shot him a quick glance of gratitude, but shook his head and went on with his story.

"Always that Jacques he is my rival, and always he cheat—even—even—when we are lov' the same girl."

His voice dropped, and his hands fell into a gesture of hopelessness. Sam looked at him wonderingly; tried to tell him to stop. The sheriff was untouched by the note of tragedy in Henri's voice. To him it was

only a runt of a Frenchman talking nonsense.

"Well, what has your love affair got to do with all this?" he barked. "If you have anything to say, say it. But don't wander off into sad stories of your lady-love."

Henri sighed, then forced a weak smile. "Ah, but I don' tell you this jus' for mak' talk. Many, many year I don' tell it to anybody. I tell it to you now, because I'm t'ink maybe you like to—w'at you call—get the goods on that Jacques, eh?"

"Sure, but what has all this balderdash got to do with it?"

"Ah, you see, but Jacques he cheat in lov', and he win those girl. She is now his wife, you see?" Henri was forcing the words from his lips, but the sheriff still showed impatience.

"Well?"

"Well, m'sieu, maybe she know Jacques is cheat now, but it is too late. Me, I'm not see her long tam'. For myself, I not ask her anyt'ing, because I lose her. But for these boy, maybe I'm ask her to tell you the trut' about that Jacques. Maybe for him she will do it."

Sam listened in growing amazement. Henri and Jacques had been rivals for the hand of the kindly, frightened little creature who was now Mrs. Thebault! And Henri, the loser, was offering to ask her to turn against her husband—Henri who had hidden his pain at losing her all these years and had asked nothing for himself. Here was a friendship such as he had never supposed existed. But he must not allow his friend to make the sacrifice. He felt that it was asking too much.

The sheriff was turning the suggestion over in his mind. He saw no pathos in it, no drama, only a suggested means by which he might catch an offender against the law. Henri awaited his decision silently.

"Henri," said Sam, "you must not do this. I won't have you do it. This is nothing. I—"

"Keep still," said the sheriff. Turning to Henri, he said: "You sure you can get the woman to talk?"

Henri shrugged. "I'm not see her for long tam'. She will be frighten' of her husban', but she will not lov' him some more. He trick her. Maybe she will tell you w'at

he do to save these boy. She is good. Her husban' he is vaire bad."

"You really think the boy is telling the truth?"

"I know he tell the trut'. He is one good boy."

"Maybe we had better take a doctor along with us, then," said the sheriff. "But if we find the boy is lying it will go hard with him."

"You mean we go after that Jacques?" asked Henri. "You let Sam go?"

"Certainly we will not let Sam go. Not until the woman gives us the goods on Jacques. Somebody has got to pay the penalty for the moonshining that has been going on around here. He stays in the lock-up until we get back."

Sam had been thinking fast. He must not let Henri make such a sacrifice for him. He knew how it would hurt his friend to ask Mrs. Thebault to forsake her husband. And he knew that if she complied with the request, Jacques would make her suffer agonies for it later. He must not be the cause of so much suffering.

"Sheriff," he said, "you have called my

bluff. There is no use to keep it up any longer. Don't bother to go up there with Henri. I brought the liquor down for Jacques. You caught me. I'll take my medicine."

"H'mm," said the sheriff. "Take him down and lock him up, Horace."

"No, no, it is not true," cried Henri.

Sam grasped his friend's hand as he passed, but he looked at the floor.

"Take good care of Spunk," he said, his voice choking.

Horace led him away.

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER "BEEG FAVOR"

IN the lock-up Sam tried to collect his thoughts. His mind ran back to that day, less than a year ago, when he had first seen the dog, Spunk. Everything dated from that day. Before that, life had been so simple. He had never known great joy then. Nor, until his father died, had he known great sorrow. All had been quiet.

Now he was caught in a great web of complications. Life had become something of so many intricacies that he could not trace their development. He was like a twig that had been floating down a peaceful stream to suddenly find itself in the vast and turbulent ocean. Yet, if he had not yielded to one impulse, he might still be on that peaceful stream.

For a moment he regretted the step that had led him into the labyrinth of life—the labyrinth through which he had floundered

until now he was completely lost in this blind pocket called the Law. But it was only for a moment. To undo what he had done would mean to take Spunk out of his life and to forget the lessons the dog had taught him. It would mean to take Happy Henri out of his life—he whose quiet friendship had such unfathomable depths. It would mean forgetting the moments of happiness that had come from intimate contact with dogs and men, and the moments of triumph that had come from little struggles with his old self. No, come what would, he would take the bad with the good, and be glad of his bargain. Better a thousand punishments for crimes he had not committed than to lose one wag of Spunk's tail, one twinkle of Henri's eyes.

Having thus summarily disposed of all vain regrets, he sat down on the edge of the hard cot in his cell and twirled the long tassel of his gayly-colored cap. Suddenly he leaped to his feet. In his eagerness to save Henri from the necessity of appealing to Mrs. Thebault, and to save Mrs. Thebault from incurring the wrath of her husband, he had forgotten the predicament in which he had left Jacques. Now he had retracted his

story, and the sheriff and Henri would think the broken ankle was only an invention of his mind. They would not send a doctor. Even now, the fresh trouble into which Jacques had thrown him was not enough to leave him insensible to the man's suffering. He must do something to get help to the injured man.

Yet, if he communicated with Henri, the latter would know at once that the entire story as told by him in the first place was true. Then he would carry out his original scheme. Sam did not want him to do that. If it came to a choice between making Henri and Mrs. Thebault suffer and leaving Jacques to suffer, he would not hesitate to chose the latter. But there must be some way to send a doctor without letting Henri know about it.

He peered through the grated windows of the dingy lock-up, but saw no sign of life. Only the old abandoned mill across the alley was visible to his gaze. Deserted and dilapidated, it seemed to mock him. He lifted his voice in a shout, hoping to be heard in the offices over his head, but his voice merely reverberated dully through the cheerless

basement behind the cell. He sat down to wait.

He tried to be calm, to tell himself that he had no cause to feel uneasy over Jacques' condition. Had not the man brought it on himself by imposing on his innocence? Did he not deserve any fate he might receive, after all the villainy he had committed? Yes, yes, but did either of these considerations excuse the boy who had it in his power to help him, or, at least, to send help to him? He knew they did not.

He made up his mind to tell Horace or the sheriff, one of whom was sure to come to him soon, that the broken ankle was an actuality. He would not say anything about the rest of the story; let them think what they pleased about that so long as they said nothing to Henri and sent a doctor to Jacques.

Presently his opportunity came. He heard a key rattling in the lock, and he rapidly went over for the hundredth time the words he had decided to use. Horace came in, bringing some food for the prisoner.

"Mr. Simpson," said Sam—everybody in town, old and young, called the constable by his first name, and for a moment he grinned

at Sam's formality, wondering what was coming—"Mr. Simpson, I told you that Jacques had a broken ankle. That much is true. You should get a doctor up to see him."

"Wa'l, naow, a feller can't tell what to believe, can he?" replied the constable, his voice implying unbelief still.

"You can believe that. Jacques is no friend of mine, but—" Sam had involuntarily passed from his prepared phrases to expression of his real feelings, but he stopped abruptly as he realized that he was getting in deep water, and might say something that would be carried to Henri and cause him to go ahead with the self-sacrificing plan he had evolved.

"If I was you," said the constable, as Sam paused, "I'd keep my mouth shut. You're gettin' all balled up."

He went out, turning the key in the lock again.

"But he really needs a doctor," Sam called after him.

"Fergit it," came back the constable's reply.

Sam found himself unable to "fergit it."

Twice more the constable came during the day, and each time Sam tried to convince him, but Horace seemed wholly uninterested. Sam knew he had done his best to help his injured enemy, but he was troubled none the less. Strangely this failure to fulfill a self-imposed responsibility troubled him more than the thought of what might happen to himself as a result of the scrape into which the self-imposed responsibility had gotten him.

A troubled night followed the troubled day. He tossed about a long time before dropping off to sleep. But at last sleep came, bringing much-needed relief to the boy.

In his dream he was again driving the dog team. He drove it fast, faster, faster. Over hills, through dense forests, across meadows, they went, with Spunk racing ahead. Fast, faster, faster. Ah! What was that up there in that tall tree? It was Jacques. He was smiling, friendly, inviting them to come up. He drove straight up the trunk of the tree, with Jacques still beckoning him on. But wait! What is he doing? Oh! He gives Spunk a push with his hand, laughing like a

fiend, and they all go tumbling back down out of the tall tree. Down, down, down—

He awoke with a start. The sun was just peeping through the rusty grates of the little window. He remembered that he was a prisoner. This was another day.

He had been awake for hours when Horace brought his breakfast.

"Did you send a doctor to Jacques?" he asked.

"Ain't you got over that yet?" returned the constable. "Seems to me you're mighty worried about that good-for-nothin'. Haow'd you get so pally with him?"

"I'm not," said Sam shortly. Then, turning the subject, "When are you going to take me before the judge?"

"In any hurry abaout it?"

"Yes, you can't keep me locked up here without a trial."

"Heh, heh," Horace cackled, and went out.

More hours passed, and Sam, trying to see the sun from the little window, knew it must have passed up into the middle of the heavens. A stray mongrel scampered down the alley outside, and Sam whistled to it,

lonesome for his own dog, but the whistle was unheard or unheeded. The dog proceeded on out of sight, and Sam sat down again to wait. He thought he had waited a lifetime already.

Why didn't they come and take him out of there? But when they did, it probably would be only to rush him through a trial and transfer him to another jail—a jail where he would have to be with other prisoners, men of Jacques' type, maybe. Well, anyway, he wanted something to happen. This dingy little hole was getting on his nerves.

At last he heard the key in the lock again. Was it the summons to the courtroom, or only luncheon?

The door swung open, and before Sam could catch his breath, Spunk lunged into the cell, leaping at him with such vigorous joy that Sam almost fell under the impact. He caught the dog in his arms, laughing and yet almost crying in surprised happiness. The dog licked his cheeks as the boy leaned over him, and wagged his tail as though it were a high-speed automaton.

Happy Henri was standing in the door,

grinning. He advanced, after a minute or two, and put his hand on the boy's shoulder. He had to reach up to do it.

"You t'ink maybe Henri and Spunk forget you, eh?" he chuckled.

"No, no," said Sam. "But what—?"

"Everyt'ing, she is all right now."

"But how—?"

"Ah! 'But how? But w'at?' You come wit' me, my frien'. I'm show you 'but how, but w'at.' "

Sam followed Henri out, as in a dream, while Spunk ran and jumped beside him, celebrating. Henri led the way up the alley, dangling in his hand the huge key—Horace's key—with which he had unlocked the door. He led directly to the room where they had sat on the day before. He pushed open the door, and stood back for Sam to enter.

"Those prisoner, here she is," he said, in mock seriousness.

"Bring him in," said the sheriff's voice loudly.

Henri gave Sam a little push, and he stumbled across the threshold. Then he saw Jacques' wife sitting there.

"Henri, what have you done?" he asked, accusingly.

"W'at I do? W'at you t'ink I do? You t'ink I b'lieve you help that Jacques sell that moonshine? I take M'sieu the sheriff up to get him. Mrs. Jacques, she come back wit' us. That w'at I do."

Sam looked at Jacques' wife. She was trying to smile reassuringly, but the frightened look was intensified in her eyes. Sam felt guilty, knowing how angry her husband would be, and imagining how brutally he would vent his anger on her.

"Where is Jacques?" he asked.

"Oh, we took care of him," the sheriff spoke up. "He's where a doctor can fix him up. After that, we'll bring him into court. As for you, I'm sorry we had to keep you locked up all night, but you know how it is. It looked as though you were in cahoots with Jacques until we questioned his wife, and she bore out your story."

Mrs. Thebault was looking up at the speaker whenever he mentioned the name of her husband, although she did not understand what he was saying about him. Sam thought she looked more than ever like a

frightened little bird, and he was sorry for her. He would much rather have taken the blame himself than to have her frightened like this, and with reason.

"Henri," he said, "you shouldn't have let Mrs. Thebault talk. Jacques will kill her, or come very close to it."

"She not have to say not'ing about Jacques but w'at the sheriff already know," said Henri. "All she have to do is tell him you not know w'at is in that box."

"Just the same he will blame her for everything."

Henri turned to the woman and talked in rapid French. She jabbered back at him, and looked at Sam kindly. Spunk went over to her, and she stroked him as she talked. Sam liked her more than ever, feeling that he had brought trouble upon her.

"She say everyt'ing is all right," Henri reported. "The sheriff, he get her work here in the village, and she say if Jacques not promise to use her good, she not go back wit' him when he get out."

Sam had remembered how Jacques had taken Spunk away from him after the dog had tried a similar method of avoiding

cruelty. How much more would Jacques be likely to use force in taking his wife back home! However, he said nothing of his doubts, not wishing to frighten the woman the more.

She turned again to Henri and began another conversation in her native tongue. Henri talked back, excitedly, and both looked at Sam significantly.

"Oui, oui, oui," said Henri in answer to some final question from her. Then, as Sam, his curiosity aroused, gaped at the couple, Henri spoke to him. "She want to ask the beeg favor of you," he said, unwittingly using the same words Jacques had used on an earlier occasion.

"Surely," said Sam. "I will do it. What is it?"

"Jacques can't tak' care of those dog, because he is seek. Marie, she can't tak' care of those dog, because she is go to work. She ask if you will tak' care of him?"

"The whole team?" cried Sam, excitedly.

"Oui."

"I should say I will."

"Il dit, 'Oui,' " Henri translated to Mrs. Thebault.

She smiled, and replied.

"She say you one fine boy," said Henri.

"Tell her for me," said Sam, "that she's one fine lady."

CHAPTER XIII

HAPPY DAYS

IT was no slight task that Sam had undertaken—the care of a dog team. The lowliest mongrel pup has to be fed and given a certain amount of attention. Much more is this true of such dogs as these great, rangy racers. Their appetites are large, and the careful trainer must prepare just the right kind of foods to keep them in condition. They are not fed the scraps left over from the table, but good solid beef, eggs and porridge. When off on a trip, they can subsist on less choice rations, but the trainer only forces them to do so when he must, for a sled dog without vitality is no sled dog at all.

Nor is the feeding the whole thing. The dogs must have their exercise and their rest. They must be kept vigorous and healthy, strong and limber. For the very reason that they must be able to sleep in a hole dug in the snow when the need arises, at other times

they must be carefully bedded regularly and their constitutions guarded jealously. For irregular hours and perpetual lack of care, contrary to the theory of some, do not toughen them but wear down their resistance. These are not wild things, born to shift for themselves in the wilderness, but the fruits of years of breeding. It is true that sometimes they will revert to the life of their primeval ancestors if left to live in the wilds, but the more natural course is for them to be the companions and dependents of man, who has brought them out of their primordial state, and for whom they will in turn give their best efforts.

And so Sam had on his hands seven blooded dogs—not blooded in the sense of being purebreds, but endowed with just enough of the blood of two or three different breeds to give them the characteristics that go to make up those beautiful creatures, racing sled dogs. Although these creatures are of many different breeds, colors, sizes, and shapes, they are, in a sense, of one breed. They are sled dogs above all else.

Purebreds such as the long, finely-chiseled Russian wolfhounds, may be considered the

aristocrats of dogdom—the bluebloods. But these are the redbloods. Theirs is an aristocracy of life and action.

Sam was ready to give them plenty of the action that they craved and needed. The thrill of the sled was in his blood, as in the blood of these seven animals. His hands itched to grasp the steering handles; his feet to feel the snow slipping backwards under them as his dogs trotted briskly through the woods and over the hills.

But first he must have a place to shelter the dogs. When there had been only Spunk, he could keep him in the cabin, but seven dogs would have packed that little home of his like sardines in a can. So, with Henri's help, he built a rough shed behind the rough cabin—a rough shed in appearance, but tight as a drum inside. At first he kept Spunk inside the cabin, as of old, but the dog took to staying in the shed with the other dogs until Sam went after him, and finally Sam let him stay with them all the time. Spunk, being the lead dog, had not wanted to be too far away from his charges. He still had the run of the cabin, however, and visited Sam whenever he felt that his responsibilities

would allow him to be away from the other members of the team.

It was drawing near the time for the racing season to open, and Henri was training his own dogs, getting them in shape for the competition. He had three young dogs that had not yet been in the harness more than a few times, and Sam watched with interest their development from carefree puppies into serious-minded sled dogs. He and Henri drove their teams together often, and Sam learned from the happy little Frenchman many little knacks of driving that long experience had taught the older man.

Henri was planning to take his dogs out to Manitoba for the annual race at The Pas, but a letter from Mr. Spencer advised concentrating on the New England and Quebec races, and Henri gave up the trip gladly, as it would leave him free to continue his training with Sam.

Henri pointed out that if Jacques were out of trouble by the time of the races, he would want to enter his team, and, if not, Mrs. Thebault probably would authorize Sam to enter it. In either case, the dogs should be put in condition. Sam entered

into this suggestion with a will. Visions of driving in the big race filled his mind.

Every day was filled to capacity with the innumerable things that had to be done. For, in addition to caring for the dogs, exercising them, conditioning them, and keeping guard over them, he had to keep at his work of making snowshoes all the harder in order to get money enough to buy the immense amount of provisions the dogs consumed, to buy liniment for rubbing them after sled trips, and to buy his own necessities of life. Many a night he worked on his snowshoes by lamplight, but even so he was no longer increasing the little roll of bills laid away for that college course he had planned. Sometimes this troubled him, but he was so happy that he soon forgot to be troubled.

Now and then he drove to the big house of Judge Baldwin, where Mrs. Thebault had been installed as a maid. She would come out in her neat cap and apron, pet the dogs and smile at Sam. Sometimes she tried to give him some money for taking care of the dogs, but Sam would not take it. She did not look so frightened now that she

had found how easy it is to be independent, but once, hearing voices around the corner, she started up quickly and then looked ashamed, as though to say she had thought it was Jacques, come to take her away.

Once or twice Sam urged Henri to go with him to see Mrs. Thebault, but Henri would not go. Sam saw that mention of her made Henri unhappy, and said no more about it.

As the days went on Sam came to know the little peculiarities of each of the dogs better and better, and the dogs likewise learned to know him. They did not watch him and try to keep out of his reach every time he came near, as they had done at first, for now they knew that he was not like Jacques, ready with a kick or a lash at the least excuse or without any excuse at all.

Garçon, the deposed leader, was now quite reconciled to his old place at the wheel position. At first he had avoided Spunk, refusing all the latter's overtures of friendship, but as time went on he seemed to forgive Spunk for taking the honor away from him, and they became fast friends, running together when out of harness and wrestling together when an exuberance of spirits

struck them. Spunk, who had been so long without canine companionship, was very happy in this friendship, although it by no means lessened his affection for Sam.

Sam retained the names he had given the other dogs—Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Doctor, and Lawyer—and soon they came to understand them and answer to them. Once, when he had driven them to see Mrs. Thebault, she called Beggar Man by his old name—Freeju, it sounded like to Sam—and she had to speak it twice before the dog realized that he was being called.

Spunk's tender feet, which had been the cause of his trouble with Jacques the year before, started troubling him a little, getting cut and bruised, but Sam seasoned him carefully, giving him just enough running to toughen his feet gradually, and rubbed them often with liniment, so that before long Spunk was as sound on his feet as Lawyer, who was the toughest of the lot.

Then, one day, Henri suggested a race to try out the teams. Sam quickly agreed, and they mapped out a course, taking them by a triangular route through the two nearest towns, a distance of about fifteen miles in

all. It was over the kind of country that the route of the big race would include—hills, snowdrifts, and winding roads.

It was an ideal morning for racing when they started from the stable where Henri kept his dogs. The air was brisk and invigorating; the sun was hidden behind clouds which dimmed its brilliance but did not threaten a storm; the roads were well packed, but not lumpy with ice. Sam was as excited as on that day at Jacques' place when he had first set his hands to a sled. The dogs, too, seemed to realize that this was no mere pleasure jaunt over the snow, and waited impatiently to be off.

Sam started first, but Henri came immediately behind. In a regular race, where there are many teams, it is customary to wait five minutes or so between teams, computing the result on the basis of time consumed, but there was no need of that with only two teams in the race.

Spunk led off with a rapid stride, and the team trotted behind him. The first few miles was flat country, and Sam increased his lead on Henri until finally the Frenchman lost sight of him around a distant bend.

Sam chuckled to himself, as he glanced back and saw no sign of his friend's team.

Soon he was in the first town, Mosstown, and people were gaping at his dog team. A crowd of small boys formed behind him, chasing and yelling. But Sam drove on, still chuckling to himself at leaving Henri behind.

Just outside Mosstown, Lawyer decided not to run so fast. Sam reached for a handful of snow to toss at the deliberate one, and tripped as he reached. He grasped the handle of the sled to keep from falling, but only succeeded in pulling the sled over with him. The dogs bunched up in confusion, and the harness became a complicated mess of tangles.

Sam jumped back to his feet, extracted a few hunks of snow from under his collar, righted the sled, and set about untangling the harness. The dogs had been excited by the spill, and refused to stand still. As soon as he had Lawyer and Garçon all straightened out, Rich Man and Poor Man would be tangled again.

Henri hove into view, and he redoubled his efforts, but before he could accomplish

his purpose, Henri had passed his stalled team with a cheerful wave of the hand and a challenging laugh.

Sam gave chase, and stuck close behind Henri's team, but he could not muster the speed to pass. After a bit, Henri began to increase his lead, and when they came to the second town, Henri had attracted the crowd of small boys before Sam drove into the street, and he had to shout at them to get them out of his way.

Sam put on a new burst of energy. His feet hardly touched the sled runners at all, and he ran behind the team and ahead of the team, urging them on. With these tactics he was soon close behind Henri again, and when Henri's dogs slowed down on a hill, Sam pushed ahead, shouting at Henri to hurry up.

Henri did hurry up, and Sam was unable to shake him from his heels. When Sam ran, Henri ran, surprising the boy with his agility and endurance. And Henri's lead dog, Napoleon, sometimes fairly ran into Sam in his eagerness to keep up.

Thus they proceeded for the last five miles of the trek, but when they approached the

village again, Sam's team was still leading, and Henri could not push his dogs by, even on the wider streets where they were now running. It had been agreed that the tree in front of Henri's stable should mark the finish line, and the first team past it should be the winner. And at last the tree was in sight, just a few rods down the street, and Sam was still leading, with Henri close behind.

Then something unexpected happened. A cat ran out of the yard adjoining Henri's stable, and stopped as it saw the dogs. Rich Man, seeing the cat and having a particularly strong aversion for cats, barked. The cat stiffened up its back, and hissed. Then Rich Man forgot all about the race, remembering only that insulting hiss. He turned in the harness, giving the team a sharp yank sidewise. Poor Man joined the assaulting party, as the cat turned and ran, and progress toward the goal line ceased. Spunk tried to regain discipline, but finding the attempt futile, decided to join the chase, and before Sam knew what it was all about, all seven dogs were tearing through the yard in the wake of a badly frightened cat. Sam

shouted, as his sled went sliding after them, but it was in vain.

The cat led them in a complete circle around the yard and back into the road again. Then it clambered up a convenient tree, and Sam, shouting, seized Spunk's harness and led him toward the finish line. The other dogs followed.

But Henri had already crossed, and was laughing merrily at the rebellion.

Sam grimaced at him.

"You win—this time," said he.

CHAPTER XIV

HENRI TELLS A STORY

THE day of the big race was drawing steadily nearer at hand, and Sam grew more and more hopeful of taking part in it. Jacques was reported to be able to get around on his injured leg again, but as yet Sam had neither seen him nor heard from him. It was generally taken for granted that the man would be summoned before the judge within a few days, and sent to prison.

Sam did not want to see Jacques, fearing that some trouble might arise between them that would cause Jacques to take the team away from him, regardless of his own probable inability to drive it in the big race. Therefore, when Henri suggested that they pack up some provisions and take a long final training trip, he acceded gladly. It would not only bring the dogs up to the top notch of their condition, but would take him out of Jacques' way until a few days before

the race. By that time, he thought, Jacques would have been sentenced.

They started early one morning, their sleds packed with beef for the dogs, light provisions for themselves, sleeping bags, and liniment for rubbing the dogs. It was not their plan to spend their nights in the open, for they wanted to give their dogs the best possible care, but they went prepared for emergencies.

No emergency arose on the first day out. They mushed along at an even speed, making no attempt to hurry, for they did not want to overtax the energy of any of the dogs on the eve of the race. They kept together, not attempting to outdistance one another. They drove over the main highways mostly, that first day, and received many curious stares and noisy greetings along the way. They met sleighs and snowmobiles, passed through little hamlets and villages and by farmhouses, where farmers' wives came to the doors, wiping their hands on their aprons, and watched them until they were out of sight.

Some people they met along the way thought the big race must be on, and asked

them questions about the other teams, but they answered all these inquiries with "Just driving for fun," and kept steadily on their way.

By mid-afternoon they were about thirty-five miles from home, in a little village in the foothills of the White Mountains. There Henri called a halt, and they drove to the village inn. The inn-keeper made room for the dogs in his stable, and Henri and Sam drove in and unharnessed. The inn-keeper brought them some eggs, and they mixed them up for the dogs, arranged some straw beds and unpacked their liniment for the usual rub-downs

And as they rubbed the dogs, they talked. Neither of them was given to much talking, but they had come to open their hearts and minds to one another now when they were alone, particularly at such times as this, when the dogs were around them, binding them together in a common affection. Their talk was usually of the dogs, and so it was now—of how well Spunk led his team; of Napoleon's fire and intelligence; of Lawyer's sturdiness.

"That Napoleon, I lov' him as I nevaire

lov' but one dog before," Henri admitted, as he worked over his favorite.

"Yes," said Sam, "he is a great dog."

"He mak' me t'ink of that other dog, Joe."

"Joe?"

"Oui, many year ago, Joe he was to me the great frien' lak' Napoleon now—only more, maybe."

"Tell me about him," urged Sam.

But Henri did not immediately respond. He worked on in silence, and Sam, sensing his mood, did not press him to talk. At last, however, Henri spoke again.

"It is the story of Jacques—and—and Marie," he said.

"Oh," said Sam.

Again Henri fell silent, and Sam waited for him to continue. The little Frenchman tried to flash his familiar smile at the boy, but the smile was something far away—something of more sadness and tenderness than a smile. He gave Napoleon a few finishing rubs, and then sat down cross-legged beside him, idly stroking the dog's head as he recalled the past, and talked of it to Sam in his broken English.

The story he told was of two young

French-Canadian trappers and a beautiful maiden and a dog. He and Jacques were the young trappers; Marie, now the wife of Jacques, was the beautiful maiden; Joe, that dog that he had loved even more than he loved the faithful Napoleon, was the dog.

With his words he carried Sam into a little French outpost in northern Quebec, a trading center for trappers and lumbermen. There had lived Marie, a pale and tender little blossom in that great rough wilderness. And when Henri came in from the woods with his dog Joe and a great load of furs, he would wait for hours in the snow-blown little street, to catch a glimpse of her pale loveliness as she passed on the other side. But Jacques was bolder than Henri, and when he came in from the woods, he talked to her and showed her his finest furs and boasted that some day he would be rich—he and the girl who should marry him.

And then, one day, both the young trappers were in the settlement at the same time, and Henri was waiting to see the beautiful maiden pass, while Jacques went boldly to her house and walked down the street with her, telling again his tales of the great

wealth his astuteness would some day bring him. And as they walked, Henri looked at them, envying that Jacques and thinking that he would give his entire load of valuable furs to walk down the street beside her like that.

Joe, as always, was at his master's feet. He had stood there watching too many times not to know that his master worshipped the beautiful little wilderness flower called Marie. And now his instincts told him that the man with her was unworthy of her presence. And so, before Henri knew what was happening, he had trotted across the street.

Marie saw him coming, and smilingly clapped her hands at him. Henri, watching, was gladdened at that, almost as though he had been in Joe's place. And Joe trotted right up to that worshipful creature and looked up at her, friendly and respectfully. She stroked him, and talked to him in a voice that made Henri, listening over there across the street, think of clear crystal cascades on a summer day.

But then the dog, having established his friendship with the pale goddess, deliberately withdrew from her touch, and, turning

to Jacques, barked a warning. Jacques laughed nervously, not wishing to be put in an unfavorable light with the lady. But Joe was not to be laughed away. He had made up his mind that this man's presence polluted the atmosphere around a sanctified goddess, and when barking proved insufficient he began to snap and nip at the man's ankles.

Marie spoke to him reproachfully, but he only paused to look up at her a moment, as though to say it was all for her good, and then resumed his harrying of Jacques. In a few minutes Jacques began to get angry, and when the dog snapped at him again, he kicked him viciously in the head. Then Joe barked all the louder and drew back to spring at the man.

But Henri had rushed across the street as he saw his dog getting rough, and he caught him around the neck just as the dog was about to spring at Jacques. He reproved the dog, while Jacques stood glowering at them both. But Marie did not glower. She came back and helped him calm the dog, and spoke to him in that crystal cascade voice. And Henri apologized for Joe's actions, but

she said he was a good dog and she loved dogs. That made Henri very happy.

After that when Henri and Joe came into the settlement, they did not wait across the street to catch a glimpse of the wilderness flower, but they went right to her house and she walked with them and smiled at them and made much of Joe. And after a long time Henri summoned up all his courage and asked her to marry him; and though Jacques had been begging her to marry him for a long time, she chose Henri.

And so the day of the marriage was set, and Henri came into the settlement in his new clothes—gay woolen trousers, a shirt with big flaps on the pockets, and a saucy little toque that was not too hot for summer but just sat rakishly on the top of his head. He felt almost like a dude, but one has to dress up on his wedding day.

He had left his canoe, well stocked, down by the river, ready to receive the bride and spirit her away down the stream on their honeymoon. He was Happy Henri indeed, as he walked gayly towards the little church where the good Father was to make the wilderness flower his wife. Joe trotted on

ahead, a great bear of a dog and proud as a peacock, glorying in the splendor of his master's gala attire.

Zing! A shot rang out, and Joe rolled over in the pathway.

Henri gave a little cry and ran to him, dropped down beside him. The faithful old friend met his eyes for just an instant, as Henri held up his head, then gave a convulsive gasp and was dead. Henri looked up and peered into the woods. Off in the thicket he caught a glimpse of a fleeing figure. He recognized it. It was Jacques, his rival, getting his revenge.

Henri looked back down at the dead body of his dog. Forgotten were the gay new clothes; forgotten, the canoe cached down there by the river; forgotten, almost, the good Father waiting at the little church to give him the wilderness flower in marriage. He took Joe in his arms and proceeded slowly on his way, the dog's blood flowing down over his new shirt, over his gay woolen trousers.

He trudged thus into the settlement, and there, standing in front of the saloon with a crowd of rough hangers-on, was Jacques,

watching him with a sneer. Henri laid down his burden beside the road, and went over to Jacques, accusing him of shooting Joe. Jacques laughed at him, a hard laugh, and called him a liar. Henri struck.

Then all those hangers-on pounced on him at once. They bore him to the ground, pounded him, kicked him, jumped on him and pounded him some more, until Henri's consciousness left him and he lay there like one dead. Then they picked him up and threw him behind the saloon, in the bushes.

He lay there unconscious and half dead while Marie, over there in the little church, wondered why he did not come to marry her. And after a while Jacques came over and whispered to her that Henri had got drunk, and they had put him to bed. But she would not believe him.

Soon he called her over to the window and pointed out. She looked, and saw Henri stagger out from beside the saloon. His clothes were torn and spattered, his hair unkempt, his face smeared and dirty. She uttered a choking sob, and started to run out the door to him, but just as she reached the door he stumbled and fell, and some men

picked him up and carried him into the saloon. The good Father, who had come to her side, drew her gently back into the church.

She had no way of knowing that it was not drunkenness that caused her intended husband to stagger and fall, to look so bedraggled. She could not know that he had been beaten up and pounded unconscious, and that he was just regaining his senses. She had seen drunken men, and this was the way they acted and looked.

Yet she would have gone to him—would have forgiven him. He would have some explanation, some excuse. Jacques heard her say these things, and cursed under his breath.

He followed her out the door of the little church. Then he touched her arm lightly, and pointed at something down the road. It was Joe—dead. He told her that Henri had killed the dog—Henri, whom she had loved because of his gentle nature, as shown by his love for dogs. And next to Henri she had loved Joe.

She wept, then, and went home. And when Henri regained his senses and went to

see her, she would not see him nor let him come in. He tried to see her again and again, but she remained in her house, weeping, and would not let him come in to explain.

After a little while she married Jacques.

All this Henri told Sam as they sat in the stable of that inn with their dogs. And though Sam had never yet understood this matter of love between a man and a woman, nor had much sympathy with it, he was moved by the story. He thought he could understand how a man could worship such a maiden as Mrs. Thebault must have been. He was sorry for Henri. And he was sorry for Marie. But, above all, he was touched by the shooting of Joe. What if Jacques should do that to Spunk?

CHAPTER XV

THIN ICE

WHEN Sam first opened his eyes next morning, Henri, already dressed, was standing at the window, gazing out at the mountains. Sam hopped out of bed, eager to be off, and quickly donned the bright-colored garments that still held his fancy.

"Where to, to-day, Henri?" he asked.

Henri turned. "You know w'at I'm lak to do?"

"No, but I'm ready for it. What is it?"

Henri beckoned, and as Sam came to the window he pointed out to Mount Washington, the king of the White Mountain range, raising its snowy head above the lesser peaks around it. A filmy white cloud—though no whiter than the peak itself—hung over it like a halo, but not low enough to eclipse any part of the mountain.

"Old Washington is clear to-day, isn't it?" said Sam, wondering why Henri should show this sudden interest in the landscape.

"You evaire climb him?" Henri asked.

The boy nodded. "Yes, I—we—used to go up at least once every summer," he said. He remembered with a thrill the feeling of lonely grandeur he used to feel when he and the Hermit stood up there above the clouds, with the rest of the world far, far below.

"I'm lak' to go up him—to-morrow," said Henri.

"To-morrow?" the boy echoed in astonishment. "Why that's a terrible climb in winter. And what about the dogs?"

"I'm lak' to tak' a dog team up him," Henri continued, still looking wistfully at the great peak and unheeding Sam's astonishment.

Sam brought his eyes back from the mountains and looked at the unperturbed little Frenchman. Just once had this thing he was proposing ever been done. Arthur Walden, the dean of New England sled-dog drivers, had taken a team up there, led by his famous old Chinook, but it had been at the risk of life and limb. Before Walden

had done it, men had said it was an impossible feat. After that, the possibility was admitted, but nobody else had cared to repeat it. Sam knew that Henri knew all this as he stood gazing calmy at the hoary monarch of New England's mountains.

Sam wondered how long this ambition had been in Henri's heart. No doubt he had charted the trip in this direction for no other reason than to get within striking distance of the mountain. He had not suspected the happy little man of harboring such romantically adventurous notions, but it suited his own spirit perfectly.

"I'm with you," he said briefly.

Henri glowed with happiness. "Maybe it is one foolish t'ing to do," he said, "but I'm wait one long tam' to do it."

They discussed the details of the plan. They would get some ice creepers before leaving the town, and then drive to the Glen House that day. Barring unforeseen trouble, they would arrive early in the afternoon. Then they would give the dogs a good night's rest and take one themselves, and start their climb the next morning, if weather conditions were favorable. Henri

knew a guide with whom he had talked of the project, and he would pick him up before starting for the Glen House.

They decided to take a team of six dogs, three from each of their teams. Out of gratitude to Sam for falling in with his scheme so readily, Henri proposed that Spunk should lead. The other dogs chosen for the climb were Lawyer and Garçon from Sam's team and three of Henri's strongest dogs, Moose, Ragtek, and Biff.

Henri went after his friend the guide, and Sam was amused to learn that the man knew all about the plans, Henri having sneaked away a few minutes in the evening before, to complete the arrangements with him. Then they started for the Glen House, and as they wanted to go by the shortest and quickest route, in order to give the dogs a good rest before their adventure, the guide, a tall sinewy man of uncertain age, by the name of Bill Pinkham, suggested they take a short cut which he knew through some mountain trails.

The trails being unmarked by wheel or runner, Sam and Henri strapped on their snowshoes. Bill Pinkham settled himself

comfortably in Henri's sled, and they started. They had been mushing along at an even pace about an hour, and were well away from human habitation, when a strap broke on Sam's harness, compelling him to stop.

"Go along," he shouted to Henri, who had stopped to see what the trouble was. "I'll follow along as soon as I fix this. It will only take a few minutes."

Henri took him at his word, and drove on. He was soon lost to sight in the woods. Presently Sam finished splicing his harness, and started moving again. Henri's tracks were plainly visible, and he made no attempt to put on speed, not wishing to tire his dogs.

He had been driving along alone in this manner the better part of an hour, when he came to a river. Henri's tracks led up the bank of the river to a foot-bridge which he could see in the distance. He looked across the river and saw that the tracks returned on the other side to a point nearly opposite him, before leading off into the woods again.

He stopped the dogs, and stepped out on the ice near the shore. It seemed to be perfectly firm and solid. There was no reason

why it should not be safe in this weather, he thought. He went back to his sled, and gave the word to Spunk to go straight across the river.

The team started forward on the snow-covered ice. A little way from the shore the snow was pretty well blown from the ice. A little farther on, near the middle of the river, Sam could hear rushing water under the ice, which was rough and lumpy. There must be rapids here, Sam decided, but even so, he felt sure the ice would be thick enough to hold him up.

The ice was getting rougher and rougher as they proceeded across the river, and Sam found it increasingly hard to manage his snowshoes among the humps and declivities. Several times the toe of one of his snowshoes caught under a jagged piece of ice, and he barely caught himself in time to avoid sprawling. Spunk was leading the dogs by a winding route, in and out among the hunks of ice that stuck up all around. This increased Sam's difficulties, as the sled had to be guided in the same circuitous path or it would upset and possibly be smashed on the ice.

Then one of his shoes caught again, just as the team veered to one side. It caught him off his balance, and as he yanked the trapped foot, the other one suddenly sank under him, and he felt it being caught by a swirling, rushing tide of icy water.

He clung desperately to the sled, and the dogs stopped as he pulled back. He stood for a few seconds, trying to extricate the foot that was in the water, but the unwieldy snowshoe caught under the ice, and he could not get it free. He gave another desperate tug, and as his weight rested heavily on the one foot that was on the ice, there was a mighty crackling, and more ice gave way. Hearing the ominous sound, he tried to throw all his weight on the sled, but it was too late. His entire footing slid from under him, and he started to sink into the raging water, pulling the sled with him, and pulling the dogs with the sled.

He released his hold on the sled, rather than pull it into the water, and grasped the jagged edge of the ice. Already the powerful current had straightened out his body, so that as he clung to the edge of the ice with his hands, his legs were being beaten against

the under surface of the ice downstream. He tried to pull himself up on the surface of the ice, but the strain only caused it to crumble off, and he barely caught a new hold in time to save himself from being carried down under.

Again and again he tried to pull himself to safety, but each time he only succeeded in making the hole in which he was struggling larger. Then one of his snowshoes stuck fast under the ice, and he found himself unable to pull it loose. If the ice broke from under his grasp once more, he would be unable to get another hold, because his foot would hold him back out of reach.

His fingers ached from the strain of holding to the slippery ice—holding against the strength of a current which seemed to grow more and more powerful every second. Yet he must hold on. To let go now would be to let the merciless rapids dash him against that jagged ice like an egg being hurled against a stone wall.

The dogs were barking, excited, but Spunk held them in their places, waiting for some word from Sam, some cry that would tell him to come to the rescue regardless of

what might happen to the sled. But at last he could stand still no longer. He turned in his tracks, and was about to rush back to the edge of the ice where Sam struggled when the boy saw what he was doing.

"Whoa, Spunk!" he yelled, suddenly realizing that his only chance now lay in getting hold of the sled again, now that the ice was breaking from under his fingers. If Spunk had started, the other dogs would have followed, and the sled would have been swung far out of his reach.

Spunk checked himself, and waited, watching the boy. Sam cautiously released his hold on the ice with one hand and began to reach out for the sled. The strain on the other hand was terrific, and it seemed that he could not possibly hold himself against the force of the water another minute. Yet he held on, reaching, straining for the sled. The tips of his fingers almost touched it, but his arm would stretch no further.

He thought the fingers by which he clung to the ice would be torn from his hand. But still he clung on, and by a great effort he moved the fingers that were grasping for the sled a half inch near their goal. The

tips of them just touched the back edge of one of the runners, but he could not grasp it.

The ice to which he was clinging began to give. He felt it buckle. If it went—

He gathered all his remaining strength for one final tug. It was his last chance. One mighty strain—and his fingers closed around the sled runner, just as the ice to which the fingers of his other hand clung dropped away from the solid edge.

The current caught him up, and started throwing him backwards. He clung to the sled runner, pulling the sled back with him towards the edge of the ice.

"Hold it, Spunk! Hold it!" he yelled.

Spunk understood, and strained forward in his traces. The other dogs, finding their leader resisting the backward force, imitated him, and the sled held fast. Sam now grasped the runner with both hands, and started pulling himself forward hand over hand. He then reached one hand over to the other runner, distributing his weight evenly.

Already, however, the ice was breaking under him as fast as he pulled his chest up on it. But the movement of his body by the

current had freed his snowshoe from its obstruction. He held on and shouted to Spunk.

"Mush along," he ordered, and Spunk started the team moving, while Sam clung with both hands. His drenched clothing caught on sharp pieces of ice, and some of the knife-like edges cut into his body, but the team moved steadily on, pulling him behind like a bag of meal, until he was at last lying flat on the solid ice.

Then he stopped the team again. For a minute or two he just lay there, exhausted. He wiggled his numb fingers. Then he slowly crawled to his knees, realizing that he must dry himself out before his dripping clothes froze to his body. He drove on across the river to the shore.

Fortunately the sled had not gone into the water, and all on it was dry. This included a supply of matches. He hastily gathered up some twigs and wood, and built a fire. Then he unpacked his sleeping bag and stretched it out near the fire. He stripped off all his clothes—the bright-colored garments made a sorry enough spectacle now—and hung them by the fire to dry, after wringing them out thoroughly. Then he

crawled into the sleeping bag to wait, and the dogs made themselves comfortable in the snow.

When he was satisfied that the clothes were dry, he donned them again, packed up his sleeping bag and continued on his way without further mishap. He was still about two miles from the Glen House when he met Henri and Bill Pinkham, traveling toward him on snowshoes without the dog team.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Where bound?"

"W'aire bound?" Henri ejaculated. "W'at happen to you? We t'ink you lose you."

"How absurd," Sam laughed.

"See here, young feller," interposed Bill Pinkham. "You be'n up to something. Tell us what it is or we'll roast ye alive and feed ye to the dogs."

Sam laughed. "I went in swimming," he said.

"Look more like ye'd be'n playing with a wildcat," replied Bill, looking at the boy's tattered clothing.

"All right," said Sam. "Have it your own way. But let's get going. I'm hungry."

CHAPTER XVI

MOUNT WASHINGTON

THE day broke cold and clear. A brisk breeze rustled through the valley, but no snow clouds threatened the mountain top. Bill Pinkham looked up at the great peak, holding its proud head six thousand two hundred and eighty-seven feet above the sea level, and smiled. He had hoped for just such a rare day in the mountains as this. On more days than not in winter, a terrific wind howls over the range, hurling great sheets of snow through the craggy ravines and against the rocky cliffs with such force that few things less rugged than a mountain could stand up under the violent battering.

But even on such a day as this the mountain is no place for weaklings. For what passes for a fierce wind in a city street would be considered no more than a gentle breeze up there—up there where the first snow becomes a coating of ice, making those danger-

ous slopes like ballroom floors pointing upward, and where succeeding snows blow about so continually that the steepest slopes are left sheer ice, or, what is worse, left with just a light covering of snow to hide the treacherous surface underneath.

Bill Pinkham had explained all this to Henri and Sam, and they were ready for the adventure. Bill was as eager for it as they, for though he had climbed the mountain innumerable times, and on much worse days than this, the adventure of driving a dog team up was quite new to him.

"Think they can make it? Think they can make it?" he kept asking Henri, referring to the dogs.

"Oh, oui," was Henri's invariable reply. Now and then, however, he asked about those icy slopes above the Half-Way House. That was where the greatest danger lay, for dogs cannot get a footing on sheer ice. The steepest slopes have no terrors for them if there is snow on them in which their feet may get a grip; they will haul a heavy load over the roughest sort of going, so long as it is snowy going. But when their feet strike sheer ice, they are helpless, for all their

strength is of no avail if there is nothing to which their feet may cling.

The party started out just after daybreak, and there were five men in it. The two new recruits had been gained the night before. They were old-timers of the mountains. Sitting around the fireplace in the Glen House, they had told Bill Pinkham that it was "a crazy stunt," but when Bill had only laughed at their warnings, they had decided they had better go along, too. One was called Zeke Fox and the other was Abel Hanley. Scrawny, spare men, they were, but tough from much tramping over the range.

Henri and Sam hitched the six dogs up single file, instead of using the usual gang hitch. Spunk was in the lead, then Garçon, Lawyer, Ragtek, Biff, and Moose. The rest of the dogs were left in the care of a stableman at the Glen House.

The party left equipped with snowshoes, ice creepers, ropes, and provisions. The three mountaineers carried packs on their backs, and the remainder of the load—a generous remainder—was packed on the sled. It had been agreed that both Henri and Sam

would need to be unhampered to manage the team, but the first part of the trail was easy, and Sam drove on alone, with Henri trotting along behind and the other three members of the party bringing up the rear.

The dogs were feeling fit for the climb, and Spunk set a good pace for them. Through the first two miles of the wooded foothills they slid on and upward, with Sam trotting after them. Now and then he rode on the runners to get his breath, for they were moving so fast that Henri, unaided by a grasp on the steering bars, had dropped behind, and the others were even farther back. Sam stopped from time to time and waited for the rest to catch up, then went on again.

"Say, I thought I was a climber," said Bill Pinkham during one of these pauses, "but them there dogs and that boy have got me beat all holler."

Sam laughed and tied a knotted rope to the sled. He tossed the end of it to Bill.

"It is the dogs that are the climbers," he said. "All you have to do is hang on. Try it."

He started the team moving again, with

Bill running behind at the end of the rope. Bill started easily, but after about five minutes had passed Sam could hear him panting heavily.

"Come on, Bill," he laughed, "faster, faster."

Bill stuck it out for another hundred yards, and then dropped the rope.

"Plenty," he gasped, as he sank exhausted into a snow bank. "And I thought it was going to be a tough job getting those dogs up the mountain. Whew!"

In a little more than two hours they had reached the Half-Way House—that little building that is chained to the ground to keep the wind from blowing it down the mountain side. Sam had been rather disappointed by the trip thus far, for he had found it hardly more difficult than an ordinary trek over the hills at home. A more steady climb and a stronger wind—that was all.

He mentioned something of the sort to Bill Pinkham, who was gazing speculatively upward. Bill turned, and cast an amused eye at the boy.

"Huh," said he. "You ain't started yet."

And he returned to his survey of the mountainside.

Zeke and Abel had started a fire in the stove of the Half-Way House, and the dogs were unhitched and allowed to go inside and rest, while the load was unpacked from the sled, the ice creepers taken out and buckled on, and a pot of coffee made.

A half hour later they got under way again, and immediately Sam realized the sagacity of the guide's remark. But the climb had really started now, and there was no mistake about that. A sharp side slope stretched from the Half-Way House to the Horn, a distance of about a quarter of a mile. It was the first of the side slopes, steep and snow-crusted. There would be no driving a dog team across that.

Bill Pinkham took charge of the situation. Abel and Zeke already had started the ascent, and were digging their creepers into the hard crust, fighting their way upward. Their bodies were leaned far forward in the wind.

"They'll wait up on the crest," said Bill. "Hitch this rope to that front dog."

Sam adjusted the rope to Spunk's har-

ness, and Henri took the steering bars. Bill took the other end of the rope and carried it up to where Abel and Zeke were now waiting. Sam waited behind Henri. Bill waved from the crest of the slope, and Henri took a strong grip on the bars and dug his creepers into the icy crust.

Then the rope tightened as the men up above pulled, and Henri started the dogs forward. The dogs went gingerly, the rope steadying them when they started to slip. Henri swung the sled on to one runner, so that it stood straight as it slid along. Had he let both runners touch the surface, the sled would have been tipped so far on one side that it could not have remained right side up.

Step by step they proceeded across the slope. Once Ragtek, in the middle, slipped badly and would have pulled the rest with him if Henri had not held back with all his strength on one end, and the men above pulled with all their strength on the other end. Step by step. Step by step. Across!

Then on to the Horn they went. The wind was increasing as they climbed, sweeping the snow entirely away from some parts

of the mountainside. Level going for a bit, and then they came to the next long side slope. They traversed it carefully, walking like cats, for this slope, like the last, was covered with hard, slippery crust, and the angle was sharp. Most of the way across it, however, the edge was guarded by a stone wall.

Side slopes and more side slopes. Some had stone walls, some none. It was a matter of fighting on and on. The cold, rare air brought tears to the eyes, so that the sparkling white snow looked blurred and opaque. Light blowing snow clung to the shaggy coats of the dogs, but they trudged stolidly on, less bothered by the atmosphere than the men. If only the footing would be more secure, and the wind a little less violent—yet they plugged on over the side slopes.

They reached the lower spur of Chandler Ridge, one of the steepest of the steep inclines. As they started to go across it they could look down a full quarter of a mile of sheer, glazed crust. No stone wall was there to help them; it was a matter of digging in the creepers and keeping their balance.

For the dogs it was the great test. There was no point from which aid could be given with ropes, and Abel and Zeke had gone on ahead. Bill Pinkham started across. Sam took his place with Spunk, to help him across that treacherous side slope, and Henri grasped the steering bars. No words passed between the man and the boy. This was a time for action.

Sam took a few careful steps, following the tracks made by Bill Pinkham's creepers. He led Spunk with him, virtually holding the dog up on the steep, slippery slope. Henri, balancing the sled on the precarious crossing, several times saved the rear dogs from slipping by his firm grasp.

A misstep, a start, and men and dogs would go hurtling down that quarter-mile incline—down, down until they would have been broken like blown-up paper bags on the boulders below. Bill Pinkham, safely across, watched the rest of the party with anxious eyes.

Henri was straining with all his might to hold the sled aright. Sam clung to Spunk, holding the whole line of dogs by holding the leader. Had another ounce of strength

been needed, they could not have mustered it. They fought on, step by step.

A suddenly strengthened gust of wind struck them, and they stopped. The wind shook the sled and it edged downwards. Henri struggled with it, but it was slipping —slipping. The dogs in the middle of the line—Lawyer and Ragtek—sagged ever so little down the side slope. They seemed to be considering the advisability of turning downwards, dashing down the slope to the bottom.

"Steady, steady," Sam whispered, realizing that if the dogs gave way there would be no stopping them until all were in a broken heap at the bottom.

Doctor turned his head slightly, looking down. Biff looked. So did Moose. By some process of telepathy they seemed to be conferring on this fatal dash.

All save Spunk. He stood immovable in his tracks, resisting with every ounce of energy in his great body the slight downward pull that had already started. Then, as some tenseness seemed to come over the whole team, as though the moment for the dash was at hand, he emitted a sharp growl.

That was all, but it arrested that fatal mutiny just as it was about to start. The other dogs stiffened their backs. The wind eased up a little, and the sled stopped sliding. The great moment of danger had passed. Step by step they passed on across the slope.

Safe on the other side, they stopped. Bill Pinkham, who had been waiting for them with an anxious heart, heaved a great sigh of relief.

"That Spunk, he know everyt'ing; he do everyt'ing," said Henri, inclusively, shouting to make himself heard through the wind.

Sam hugged the dog's shoulders, but Spunk was not the least bit excited. He thought he had done nothing more than was to be expected of him. He was the lead dog, was he not?

They went on. Up, up, and ever up. More slopes, more tense moments. But Spunk was always leading, calm, resourceful, and firm. On they went over the rocks near the summit, where the wind had blown great stretches of sheer cliff bare of every touch of snow.

There ahead of them, at last, was the

Summit House. Zeke and Abel were waving their arms. Henri stopped the team.

"You drive him to the top," he said to Sam.

"No," said Sam, "this is your party. I'll run ahead with Spunk."

In that moment it was Henri who was the boy. Sam was the indulgent friend. And Henri was as pleased as any boy could be at having the satisfaction of driving a dog team to the top of Mount Washington. Sam found his pleasure in the joy of Henri's face.

They drove on by the Summit House, where Abel and Zeke roared at them as they passed, and attained the very highest point on the mountain. There they stood, the wind whistling around them, and looked down on the wintry world far, far below.

In other times Sam had looked down at the world from this spot when it was green with life and warm with sunlight. Now it was cold and frozen. But as he stood there with his hand resting on the head of a great, shaggy dog, as he looked at the little Frenchman who had fought so hard to get up there and saw him disregarding the beauty of the landscape to comb the frozen snow from the

furry coats of the dogs, he felt, somehow, that the great world below was warmer than he had ever seen it before.

Or was it the boy's heart that was warmer?

CHAPTER XVII

THE PHILOSOPHER

THE descent was a simpler matter. Not that it was without peril. There were many moments when a less intelligent lead dog than Spunk might have led team and driver to certain death. And there were times when a team with less faith in its driver than this team might have balked and fled to an easier path—a path on which there would have been no returning. But this team had Spunk at its head; it had Henri and Sam alternately at its back. It went down over the mountain like a well-trained cavalry horse. The men trusted the dogs, and the dogs trusted the men. And each knew the trust that was placed in him. And each would have died rather than fail in that trust.

So they came down over the mountain, sliding here, slipping there, but always regaining their balance and proceeding on-

ward. And just as the sun was sinking into the mountains, they came in sight of the Glen House again.

The team swung around into the stable on the trot. But once inside, they began to show their fatigue. The other dogs already had settled down for the night, and Sam quickly unhitched the tired climbers while Henri prepared their food. They were hungry as wolves, yet so tired they could hardly muster the energy to eat. And as soon as they had eaten, they cuddled down on their straw beds without waiting for their customary rub-down. Dog-tired, they were.

Sam, too, was tired, and he knew Henri was. Already Bill, Zeke, and Abel would have eaten a hearty meal and would be snoozing around the open fireplace with their boots off. Sam looked down at Spunk, and saw that the dog was sound asleep, every aching muscle relaxed, every care and responsibility forgotten. The other dogs were swelling a great chorus of snoring. The day's work was done.

Work? Yes, it had been work, but what had it profited them? They had tired themselves out, and tired their dogs out. They

had risked their own lives, and risked their dogs' lives. And now here they were back again, with only a whim satisfied to pay them for their trouble.

Sam wondered if he ever would have forgiven himself if anything had happened to Spunk on that climb. That time when they were all about to go catapulting down over the side slope, for instance. The other dogs were faithful, strong-hearted fellows, every one, and yet in that moment they had been ready to waiver. And who could blame them? Spunk, alone, had stood fast, stemming the tide of destruction. If he had weakened for one little instant—

"Henri," said Sam, "why did we do it?"

"W'at you say?" said the puzzled little Frenchman.

"This climb up the mountain—what good did it do?"

"You don' have a good tam', no?"

"Yes, of course I had a good time, but think of the risks we took."

"Ah, oui, I see; you t'ink we risk every-t'ing for not'ing, eh?"

"Well, that's about what we did, isn't it?"

"Henri don't t'ink so, my frien'. I'm tell

you. Nex' week there is one beeg race. That race she tak' us over many beeg hill. The man w'at can run the mos' over those beeg hill, he help his dogs mos' and mak' it easier for those dog to win those race. Now those beeg hill she seem vaire hard to run over. We get vaire tired. But we look back jus' one little week, and we say, 'Va, these hill she is not'ing. I can climb those beeg mountain.' Then we feel jus' lak' run right up over those hill and the nex' one and the nex' one. You see?"

Sam let the significance of Henri's explanation sink in, and then nodded.

"Yes, I see," he said. "The littlest hill seems hard to climb if you always have walked on level ground. Is that it?"

"Oui," said Henri. "And the worl', she is full of hills—not real hills, but t'ings w'at are hard to do. If you are w'at you call a shirk, they will be vaire, vaire hard to do. But if you have done many hard t'ings, why, you don' mind at all."

Sam nodded. "Why, Henri, you are a philosopher," he said.

"Eh, w'at you say?" said Henri. "W'at is that?"

"Nothing. I mean you are a thinker."

"Oh, sometam' I'm t'ink; sometam' I'm don' know."

Sam laughed. Then his roving eye rested on the sleeping form of Spunk again, and again he thought of the peril into which he had taken the dog.

"But Henri," he said suddenly, "was it quite fair to the dogs to take them up there and make them risk their lives just so you and I could know we had done something that was hard to do?"

Henri was silent for a moment. He looked around at the dogs, all sound asleep and snoring happily.

"Look, my frien'," he said, then. "Those dog, they res' content. They have done the bes' she know how to do for you and for me. I lov' those dog; you lov' those dog. So it mak' them vaire happy to work hard for us, and to tak' those beeg chance wit' us.

"That Spunk, and those Jacques dog, they have work for one man who is no good. He don' care for them; they don' care for him. But yet they work hard for him jus' the same. But they are not happy.

"Then you tak' him, and you use him fine.

You lov' him, and they lov' you. But if they don' do their bes' for you, if they shirk or run away from danger, still they are not happy.

"No, my frien', it is good for the dog to let him work for you, if you lov' him. It is good for him to go in danger if you go in danger. Because then, when it is all over, he will res' content."

Sam considered this in silence. Here was a simple philosophy, and yet it went to the very roots of things.

"It is the same wit' you and me, my frien'," Henri went on. "We don' res' content until we find some one to do our bes' for, and then we don' res' content until we do it."

"That must be the theory of friendship," said Sam, his eye resting again on his peacefully sleeping lead dog. "I do my best for Spunk, and Spunk does his best for me—and we are both happy. And the same with you and me, Henri."

"Oui," said Henri.

"Hey! Ain't you fellers ever going to come in and eat?" It was Bill Pinkham, shouting.

"Not a bad idea," said Sam.

"I never see such fellers," Bill continued, entering the stable. "Foolin' around with them dogs while your supper gets cold."

Then, looking at the sleeping chorus, he exclaimed, "They're sleepin' the sleep of the just, all right, ain't they?"

"They rest content," said Sam. "Let's eat."

CHAPTER XVIII

DREAMS FADE

THE day after the climb Henri and Sam laid over at the Glen House, giving the dogs that had gone up the mountain a complete rest. They harnessed up the other dogs and took them out for a brief run to keep them in exercise, but for the most part they were quite willing to take a rest themselves. Bill Pinkham strapped on his snowshoes and set out across country for home, and Abel and Zeke started for some unannounced destination.

But one day was all that could be allowed for rest, with the big race drawing nearer and nearer at hand, and the following day found the two dog teams trekking homeward. They made an early start, hoping to make the entire distance in one day, and nightfall found them driving once more down the familiar village street.

Sam almost dreaded to be back in the vil-

lage again, lest he should hear some word from Jacques—some word that would dash his hopes of participating in the big race. He tried to stifle his misapprehensions, to tell himself that by this time Jacques must be safely behind barred doors, but in spite of himself he continued to conjure up visions of the dog-beater. Every time he turned a corner he held his breath, waiting to see if Jacques were lurking on the other side; every time he approached a big tree or a wall, he sped faster, lest the man he feared to see should be lying in wait.

Spunk and the other dogs, trotting along over these familiar roads, failed to sense their driver's mood, wrapped up as they were in the pleasant anticipation of getting home again. Henri, too, was busy with his own thoughts—thoughts of final preparations for the race—and he drove along ahead with his happy smile broader than ever.

When they reached Henri's stable, Henri's dogs swung in on the trot, and Sam's dogs started to follow, for it is the way of sled dogs to turn in at any building where, at one time or another, they have been sheltered, no matter how long ago it may have

been, nor for how long. Sam, concealing his anxiety from Henri, shouted a cheerful farewell and ran ahead to guide Spunk past the stable. Then he resumed his place at the steering bars, and mushed on towards the ridge.

It was now quite dark, and the few flickering street lights of the village were shedding an uncertain glow over remote spots in the snow.

"Hi-yi, Spunk, hi-yi!" yelled Sam, eager to reach the safety of the ridge. The dog responded with a will, for he and the other dogs were equally eager to be at home again.

Up yonder Sam could see the lighted windows of the drug store, the last store he had to pass before leaving the village behind and passing into the dark highway leading to the ridge. As he looked, a man came out of the store, making a shadow on the reflected light. Sam's heart turned over within him—or seemed to—for the man, as near as he could tell, was wearing a fur cap, a mackinaw, woodsman's trousers and mocassins—just such a costume as Jacques was accustomed to wear.

The man was walking into the middle of

the street, looking down at the approaching dog team. For a moment Sam considered wheeling the team around—going back to Henri's—anywhere. He dismissed the thought at once, as he realized that if this were Jacques, flight would be of no avail. If Jacques were free, Jacques would drive the team in the race or it would not be driven at all, unless—. Ah! There was a possibility. Maybe his injured leg would still be bothering him. Maybe he would let Sam drive if he did not arouse his anger. The boy determined to drive on steadily, and if this were Jacques waiting for him in the middle of the road, he would make the best of it.

But it was not Jacques. He breathed a sigh of relief when he was near enough to be sure of that. Whoever it was, though, was holding up his hand as a signal for Sam to stop. Sam did not know him, but he stopped.

"Are you Sam Briggs?" the man asked.

"Yes."

"My name is Wallace Bronson." Sam remembered hearing Henri speak of this man, a business man who raised and drove sled dogs as a hobby, and who was a great

favorite with all the other drivers and followers of the sport.

"Oh, yes, I've heard of you," said Sam, wondering what Wallace Bronson could want of him.

"That is Jacques Thebault's team you are driving, isn't it?" Bronson asked.

"Yes. All but the lead dog. He's mine."

"Well," said Bronson, "I don't know what arrangements you had with Jacques. He is such a scoundrel you can't believe anything he says, anyway. But they tell me you are a friend of Happy Henri Rousseau's, and so I know you must be all right. That's why I stopped you to tell you that Jacques has been waiting for you with fire in his eye for the last two days, swearing that you ran off with his team to ruin his chances of winning the race by tiring his dogs all out. I thought you might like to be ready to meet him."

Sam's heart sank. His worst fears were realized. His fondest hopes seemed to be shattered.

"Jacques—is—out?"

"Out? Certainly he is out," said Bronson. "Oh, you thought he was sent to jail for that bootlegging mess he was in?"

"I thought—oh, I don't know." Sam felt completely lost.

"The judge just held him for the grand jury, and let him out on bail," Bronson explained.

"Thanks," Sam mumbled.

"Why don't you drive your dogs over to my stable for to-night?" Bronson suggested. "It is getting late and they seem tired." He gestured toward the dogs, all lying down now in the road, taking advantage of the stop to rest a bit.

"No, thank you," said Sam, thinking to himself that this probably would be the last time he could ever drive the team up over the ridge to the cabin. "I guess I had better take them home to-night."

"Well, I'll see you later," said Bronson, going back to the store.

"Thanks," Sam mumbled again.

He drove on, dejectedly. Then he reflected again that this probably was his last trek up the ridge with the team. He must get the most out of it. He began to run, tossing snow at the dogs, trying to regain his old racing spirit—that spirit that had never yet been allowed a chance to express

itself in a real race, and now probably never would be.

"Hi-yi, hi-yi," he shouted. But the words sounded dull and empty in his ears. The dogs, too, seemed to notice the change in his tone. They pricked up at the words, but quickly dropped back into their usual gait again, failing to catch any contagion of enthusiasm from the driver.

He gave up the attempt. What was the use of trying to fool himself into thinking he was full of vim and enthusiasm when in reality he was in the depths of depression. He could not even fool the dogs, much less himself. He left the pace-making to Spunk and dejectedly rode along on the runners, all the time nearing home.

The dogs, climbing the ridge, had slowed down to a walk. To-morrow, Sam decided, he would hitch them up again—all except Spunk—and drive them down to find Jacques.

"So? You t'ink you sneak in when it is dark and Jacques not see you, eh?" The voice, out of the darkness, struck Sam like a bolt of lightning.

"Jacques!" he exclaimed.

"Oui, it is Jacques." The voice was snarling.

Sam could see his figure now, coming from out the shadows at the side of the road. Involuntarily Sam's muscles tightened. Spunk, hearing the voice, growled, and the whole team stopped, tense, excited.

Sam wanted to avoid trouble. "I just got back," he said. "I was going to bring the team down to you in the morning."

"You steal those dog. You tak' him away and try to tire him out so Jacques will lose those race. I'm feex you." Jacques' voice was rising in violent anger.

"Why, you ingrate," returned Sam, himself getting angry now, "you know I did nothing of the kind. I took the dogs to care for them and get them in shape for the race while you were laid up, because your wife asked me to."

"Nevaire mine' about my wife," yelled Jacques. "I feex her for squealing on me, and I'm feex your frien' Henri for stick his nose in my business, too. I'm feex him good. My wife ask you—huh!"

"See here, Jacques," said Sam, controlling himself with an effort, "your dogs are in

good condition, all ready for the race. There's no use in your getting all excited. I'll put them up to-night, and you can either come and get them in the morning, or I will drive them down to you."

"You t'ink I'm one beeg fool, eh?" snarled Jacques. "You t'ink I'm let you get away wit' those dog again? You don' know Jacques. I'm tak' him now. And don' you worry, I'm feex you; I'm feex Henri; I'm feex everybody."

"It's pretty late, Jacques. The dogs are tired. They have traveled a long distance and need rest."

"Don' worry, I'm keep him awake." Jacques, to demonstrate his ability to keep the dogs awake, began kicking them to their feet, one by one. The dogs barked and snapped at him, but he only laughed at their show of rage. "I'm feex you," he muttered, over and over again.

"You insist on taking them to-night?" repeated Sam, thinking by submission to put an end to Jacques' mauling of the dogs.

"I'm tak' him right now."

"Very well, I think you are crazy, but go ahead. I'll unhitch Spunk."

"You unhitch not'ing. I'm tak' my team —all of him."

"But Spunk is mine. You gave him to me, and I intend to keep him."

"That team, she is mine—all of him. I'm tak' him."

"See here, Jacques Thebault," said Sam, the anger again creeping into his voice, "I've taken a lot of insults from you to-night. I've taken care of your team for you—better than you ever did—and I don't want any thanks from you for it. But you gave Spunk to me in return for saving your worthless life, and I intend to keep him. He's mine, do you understand? You'll not take him away from here."

"You don' t'ink I will, eh?" said Jacques, menacingly. "You listen, you. I'm don' give you not'ing, you understan'? Not'ing. You try to steal my team. Your frien' Henri, he try to steal my wife. But I'm feex you."

Jacques was walking up and down beside the team now, shaking his fist under Sam's nose every time he came near, and taking vicious kicks at the dogs as he went along. The dogs were all standing up, watching,

ready to dodge and snap when he approached them, snarling and barking continually.

Sam, seeing the futility of argument, walked up the other side of the team to Spunk. The dog was eyeing Jacques, barking and growling, but he became quiet as Sam came up to him, and looked up at the boy, as though asking permission to spring at this tormentor. Sam stroked his back, whispered a quieting word, and leaned over to unhitch him.

"You leave those dog alone," Jacques commanded.

Sam paid no attention, but continued fumbling with the harness. He heard Jacques step up behind him, but he only worked the faster, getting ready to grapple with the man when he turned around.

Suddenly a blinding flash of light seemed to envelop him, and then—. He was lying in the road. He did not know how long he had been lying there. It was still dark. His head ached horribly. He was alone.

He struggled into a sitting position, and held his head in his hands. A great bump on his head made him understand what had happened. Jacques had laid him low with a

club. The dogs were gone—Spunk with them. He got to his feet, stiff and aching all over, and started slowly toward his cabin.

He ached all over. But, particularly, his heart ached. Everything seemed at an end. He wanted to cry like a girl, but no tears came. Oh, the cruelty of life! Why had he allowed himself to become entangled in it? Why could he not turn his back on it now, and be the Hermit's son again? No, that was all over. He was Sam Briggs now, trainer and lover of dogs, pal of one particular dog, friend of Happy Henri Rousseau—yes, and friend of Marie Thebault, Bill Pinkham, Abel, Zeke. Never again could he be the solitary lad of the hermitage.

He entered his cabin and threw himself down on his bunk. Heartsick. Lonesome. The Hermit's son was lonesome!

CHAPTER XIX

THE DOG DERBY

ONCE again the little village square was crowded with people, for it was the day the big dog race was to start. Already three or four drivers were waiting beside their teams. Others were driving down the street from various stables, and still others were harnessing and making final preparations for departure.

The drivers had come here from far distant places and from places nearer at hand, to take part in this race. There were the usual number of Quebec drivers, who talked in that French-Canadian way, like Henri and Jacques. There were drivers from the great Canadian Northwest—men who trained their dogs by hauling freight sleds over the vast, frozen lands of that great territory. Then there were the men like Wallace Bronson, sportsmen who drove purely for the love of the game and for the love of dogs.

Jacques Thebault's name was a byword with those men—a symbol for all that is despicable and undesirable. He was the disgrace of the sport. All the other drivers, trainers, and followers of the races had at least caught a glimpse of the hearts and souls within their dogs, and one who has done that will respect his dogs, even if he does not love them, which is more likely. But to Jacques dogs were just dogs—things to be kicked and prodded and beaten until they should go faster and faster to make him the winner of the race and the big money prize that goes with it.

Most of the other drivers, too, wanted that money prize, and they intended to exert themselves and their dogs to the limit in order to win it. But more than the money, they wanted the glory of winning—glory for themselves and for their dogs. They were proud of their dogs, as a man is proud of his own children. They relied not on their own ability to harry the dogs on to greater and greater speed, but on the racing spirit which had been bred in the dogs from puppyhood. Any one of those drivers—except Jacques—would have given up his chance to win,

rather than break the spirit of his dogs. That was why they spoke of Jacques in a scornful, half-angry tone. They were one great fraternity, bound together by common emotions—the New England sportsmen, the Quebec couriers and trappers, the Western freighters and traders. But Jacques was outside the pale. He was a dog-beater.

So, as Jacques drove up behind the starting line and pulled his team over to the side of the road to await his turn to start, there was no exchange of greetings between him and the other drivers and trainers. But if they despised him for being a dog-beater, he despised them just as much for being, to his way of thinking, soft and romantic about their dogs. Therefore he wore a sneer on his face as he looked over at the little knot of drivers gathered around Henri's team. "Fools," he muttered.

Jacques was pleased with himself. He had retrieved his dogs, and they were in splendid condition. He had never known them to be so full of life and strength. With that dog the boy called "Spunk"—the dog he had once given up for a hopeless cripple—to lead them, there was not a better team en-

tered in the race. No, there was not a team that could equal his. He was sure of it. And how he would drive them, harry them, hammer them, until they had spent every last ounce of energy!

So great was Jacques' confidence that he had scraped together every penny he had in the world and had bet it on his own team. Up to the very hour of starting the race, he had fairly lived in the pool room, for it was there that he could find men who would bet with him. Now he had bet all he owned. If he lost he would be penniless. But he would win—he was sure of it. He did not see how he could possibly lose.

The teams were being started at five-minute intervals. This gave each one a clear field until he overtook somebody else or was overtaken, and prevented bunching all the teams up together, which would be impossible on the narrow roads. The winner was to be decided by computing the actual time used by each team, not by their positions at the finish line. The drivers, therefore, stood around with their dogs behind the starting line, waiting for their turns to start. From time to time officials of the race approached

one or another of them for a hasty conference on some point that had been overlooked.

Now one of the officials approached Jacques, as he stood alone with his dogs waiting for his name to be called out.

"Hey, you, aren't you taking any trainer?" he asked, waving his hand toward the fleet of snowmobiles standing ready to take the judges, officials and trainers around the course.

"Who? Me?" asked Jacques. "W'at for I—"

"I'm his trainer."

Jacques and the official both looked around at this interruption. It was Sam. The boy had been wandering aimlessly around in the crowd until he had involuntarily stopped near Spunk and the rest of the team—his team, it had almost been. He had overheard the conversation between Jacques and the official, and he had seen in it his chance to stay near the dogs throughout the race, and to look out for their welfare. It was only a chance. Jacques probably would disclaim him angrily. But it worth trying. So he had spoken up.

For a few seconds Jacques merely glared

at the volunteer trainer. The official, taking silence as corroboration, started to give Sam instructions about having the dogs ready on time in the morning, where they were to be put up at night, and other details.

Finally Jacques spoke. "Hey, w'at you t'ink—"

"Jacques Thebault, starting in one minute," yelled the announcer.

Jacques hastily roused his team and drove to the starting line, leaving the denunciation unspoken. Sam breathed a sigh of relief, and listened to the instructions of the official. The pistol shot rang out. Jacques was off.

Henri started behind Jacques, and Sam had just time to acquaint his friend with the successful ruse before the latter, too, was called to the starting line. Henri feared that some trouble would result from Sam's action, but Sam laughed at his fears, and Henri had no time to find words in which to express them before he went.

One by one the other drivers were called to the starting line and given the signal to start the long, three-day trek. When the last one had gone, Sam climbed into a snowmobile with some other trainers and started

to overtake them. The snowmobiles could go just fast enough so that they could start just after the last team and arrive a little while before the first team in the town where the day's run was to end. They thus started overtaking teams from the first, and continued to pass them, one by one, throughout the day. There were twelve teams in the race.

Sam's gloomy spirits had risen at the thought of being able to take some part in the race, even though it was a minor part. He felt easier about the dogs, knowing that he would be in a position to look out for their comfort after each day's run. But as he bumped along in the snowmobile, he began to have misapprehensions. Jacques was angry at his interference. Only a trick of fate had saved him from being disclaimed at the start. What would happen at the finish of the day's trek, when there would be no imperative call from the announcer to take Jacques away? Would his enemy merely report the situation to the officials, or would he take some more vengeful method of getting rid of him? It was not a pleasant outlook, but Sam determined to go about the

duties of a trainer quite calmly, in the hope that Jacques' laziness would be stronger than his wrath. Perhaps, seeing all the necessary chores done for him, the driver would consider it a good bargain, since Sam naturally would not be expecting pay for his work.

But even if Jacques let him alone, Sam reflected that the dogs were far from safe. He remembered that scene, a year ago, when Jacques had given Spunk a terrible beating simply because the dog's feet had become so bruised and cut that he was running lame. That had been while the race was being run. Even as a trainer, Sam could not prevent a repetition of this act, should Jacques get enraged again along the course. Good old Spunk. Jacques had just better let him alone. And for that matter, he had better not vent his dirty disposition on Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Doctor, Lawyer, or Garçon. If he did—well, Sam did not know just what he would do about it, but he told himself that Jacques would answer to him for it.

As he rode along, musing thus, he became aware of some one waving at him from the

snowmobile behind. He looked more closely, and recognized Mr. Spencer. The Boston man had donned high boots, a leather jacket and cap, and was riding as Henri's trainer. Sam had known that he was to be there, but he had not seen him before. He waved back, and presently, when the fleet of snowmobiles stopped to take on gasoline, he went back and spoke to him. Mr. Spencer was cordial, having had enthusiastic reports about the boy from Henri. He was surprised to learn that Sam was acting as trainer for Jacques, but when the boy had explained the way it came about, he approved his act, though cautioning him to take pains not to antagonize Jacques.

They rode on again, passing dog teams from time to time. When they rode through villages, there would be double lines of people along the streets, waiting to see the dog teams pass through. Every farmhouse was a grandstand. Even isolated crossroads would be populated with folks who had come in from nearby villages and farms to see the race being run.

"How many more teams?" they would yell, and those in the snowmobiles would

hold up the required number of fingers to give them the information. Sam found himself catching the happy spirit of the crowds —he who had always shunned crowds—and he was soon waving and smiling as cheerfully as Happy Henri himself might have done. But now and then his doubts about the welfare of Spunk and the other dogs of his team would catch him, and he would drop his hand in the midst of a hearty salute.

As they neared the end of the day's course, it became evident that either Henri or Jacques was leading. They had passed all the other teams, including the two that had started ahead of them. The men in the snowmobiles began to fear that they might not arrive early enough to time the two leading teams at the finish.

"There they are!" came the cry from the leading snowmobile. Sam leaned out and looked. Up ahead he saw the two teams, stalled in the road while a freight train slowly chugged forward and back on an intervening railroad crossing.

The snowmobiles stopped a little distance behind, so as not to interfere with the dogs. As they waited, Sam saw that the train had

stopped dead still. Henri was looking anxiously at the engine, far down the tracks, and Jacques was shaking his fist and stamping his feet, angry as usual.

Henri seemed to determine on a plan of action, for he began to unhitch his dogs from the sled. Then, glancing again at the engine to make sure it was not about to move, he loosened the dogs, spoke to Napoleon, his leader, and sent them under a freight car to the other side. There they stopped, waiting obediently.

Sam held his breath as he realized what his friend was doing. What if the train should start? But Henri, intent on keeping his lead, now lifted his sled up on the couplings between two of the freight cars, hopped up after it, dropped it to the other side, jumped down and hitched up his team again, ready to continue. Sam breathed easily again, when he saw that no mishap had occurred.

Jacques, however, watched his rival with growing wrath. Seeing him successful, he undertook to imitate him. He unhitched his team, and Spunk led them under the train unhesitatingly. He swung his sled up on the couplings, jumped up after it and bal-

anced precariously for a few seconds. Then, just as he was about to lower the sled to the other side, the train lurched forward. The sled slid safely to the ground, but Jacques, leaning over, teetered helplessly for a moment, then slipped.

The men in the snowmobiles, watching breathlessly, could not see what happened to him, but a horrible scream of agony told them that the moving train had caught him under it. They swarmed from their seats and ran forward. The train stopped, just beyond the crossing, and the trainmen ran back to see what had happened.

Jacques lay writhing in the snow, his foot mangled and bleeding. He had attempted to throw himself forward as he fell, but one foot had been crushed under the wheels of the heavy freight. Sam had never seen such suffering, and he shuddered. One of the judges of the race was a doctor, and he quickly gave the injured man first aid treatment, after which the men lifted Jacques into a freight car, to be rushed back to the little hospital in East Bryantsville.

As the train started, Sam hitched the dogs up to the sled again.

"We should have sent the team back on the train, too," exclaimed one of the judges, noticing Sam at work over them. "Are you their trainer?"

"Yes," said Sam. "I'll take care of them." He thought a moment, then hailed the judges again as they started to climb into the snowmobiles. "Why can't I finish out the race with them?" he asked looking anxiously at the men.

"Oh, that would be very irregular," objected one of the judges.

"Yes, indeed, it would," said another. "Yet—" He left the sentence unfinished, and Sam pressed his cause harder.

"It seems pretty hard on a man to have to lose his chance in the race as well as his foot," he urged.

"Why don't you let the boy do it? I don't believe the other drivers would object," interposed Mr. Spencer. Several other trainers expressed their willingness to have Sam finish the race.

"Well," said the chief judge, "this is a most unusual case, but I am willing to let him finish if the others are."

It was agreed, and Sam grasped the steer-

ing bars. It seemed as though he had never released them to Jacques.

"Hi-yi, mush on, Spunk," he cried.

The long tassel of his vividly colored cap frisked around his head as he ran behind the team.

CHAPTER XX

BIG STAKES

RACING! Sam had dreamed of it, and had seen his dreams disappear in thin air, but here he was running and riding over the sparkling snow, feeling a delicious thrill in the knowledge that behind him ten men were driving ten dog teams with all speed, trying to overtake him and his dog team. The horror of Jacques' accident faded in his mind as the spirit of the race surged through him.

Ahead of him was only Henri, his friend. Sam cut short a cry of encouragement to the eager dogs as he thought of this phase of the race. He was not sure he wanted to pass Henri. It would mean winning for his enemy over his friend. Yet, like every other true dog driver, he wanted Spunk to win—wanted his team to win.

No such contradictory thoughts bothered his dogs. They only knew that it was the

friendly voice of the boy urging them on now, instead of the snarl of their old master. In response to that friendly voice, they were finding new funds of energy, new bursts of speed, new courage for the long, heartbreaking hills. Spunk, particularly, was fired with fresh zeal by that voice—he who knew the boy as more than a friend, more than a kind master; he whose life the boy had saved, and who had, in turn, taught the boy the value of his own life.

And now, as Sam hesitated about urging the dogs on to overtake Henri, the dogs sped on without waiting to be urged. Indefatigable, they seemed; going on and on, fast and faster, up hill and down, through drifts and over windblown stretches. Now they galloped; now they trotted. Only on the longest hills did they slow down to a brisk walk, and then only for a brief respite. They were racing.

Their enthusiasm was contagious, and it was not long before Sam found himself as thoroughly imbued with it as they. Racing! He was racing! On! On! Faster! Faster! Thus his thoughts were no longer in the nature of questions, but exclamations.

"Hi-yi, Spunk! Get on Doctor! Up Beggar Man! Mush on! Mush on!" His cries were not needed, but they came from his throat involuntarily, as joyous yelping came now and again from the throats of the dogs. Now he was as indefatigable as they. Nothing mattered but that the trees on either side of the road should continue to float past and behind him. On! On! The boy seemed to travel on air.

Presently, as he raced behind his team over the crest of a long hill, he saw Henri at the foot. The little Frenchman's sled was pulled out at the side of the road, and he was bending over one of his dogs, evidently adjusting the harness. Sam hopped on the runners of his sled and rode down the hill, while his dogs ran at full gallop to keep ahead. They reached Henri's side, and Sam stopped the dogs.

Henri looked up in surprise, not having seen the accident that befell Jacques. Sam hastily explained, while Henri struggled with words to express his mingled emotions —happiness that Sam should have his chance in the race, and pity for the injured Jacques.

"But what are you stopped for?" Sam asked.

"My Ragtek, he go lame. I have to tak' him out. You go on; I'm catch you yet." Henri grinned as he uttered the warning.

"That's hard luck about Ragtek," said Sam. Then, in reply to the warning: "Look me up when you get in."

He released the brake, and the eager dogs were off before he could get the words of command from his mouth. He waved at the grinning Henri as he trotted after them. Then he swung into the spirit of the race again.

"Hi-yi, Spunk! Mush on! Mush on!"

The fleet of snowmobiles had been in the village where the first day's trek was to end some time before Sam arrived, and the word had rapidly been spread that a youthful trainer was driving in place of Jacques Thebault, who had been seriously injured by a train. When Sam drove down the street, therefore, the first driver in, a great cheer went up on all sides. It was a new sensation to the boy, who never before had known the thrill of earning applause from a multitude. Spunk led the dogs proudly across the finish

line, basking in the glory that was being poured on them, but Sam, not knowing how to respond to the wave of applause, looked neither to right nor left, but trotted behind his sled, gazing intently at his dogs.

A group of Boy Scouts hurried forward to show him where his dogs were to be put up, and to help him take care of them. Trainers and officials crowded around to congratulate him. The announcer's voice boomed out, telling the crowd who he was and what his time had been for the first day. Sam was in a daze. He found himself enjoying his new prestige, as any normal boy would have done, yet the enjoyment of applause was more complex and confused than that thrill he had felt from the racing itself, out there on the highway. There he had been himself. Here he felt like some one he had never known before. Certainly this could not be the Hermit's son, taking pleasure in the cheers of a fickle mob.

The stable where he was to put up his dogs was only a short distance away, and he hastily unharnessed them and left them to rest while he went back to welcome Henri in. He had half expected to have Henri over-

take him again before the finish, and now he was sure that his friend would be arriving within a few minutes. Returning to the crowded finish line, however, he found the crowd still waiting for the second arrival. The boy looked down the road, but no team was in sight.

The minutes passed, and still there was no sign of Henri. Sam began to wonder what could have happened. Then a cry of "Here comes another one!" went up from the crowd. Sam pushed forward and looked down the road. This would be Henri. But was it? He looked more carefully. It was not Henri.

"Johnny Burns of Manitoba now finishing," yelled the announcer.

Sam could not understand it. Where was Henri? This Johnny Burns, a youth almost as young as himself, had started some time after Henri and Jacques. He must have made fast time. But even so, Henri should have been in before this.

Now the announcer was giving out Johnny Burns' time for the day: "Four hours and forty-one minutes, equalling the time made by Sam Briggs." A buzz of

comment went around the crowd at the announcement.

"Sam Briggs?" said Johnny Burns, perplexed. Sam saw some men pointing him out then, as they explained to Burns what had happened to Jacques. Sam pushed through the crowd to Burns.

"Where did you pass Happy Henri?" he asked the other youth.

"Just about a mile out," was the reply. "He was having some trouble with his dogs —one of them lame or something. You don't need to worry about him. I'm the one who's going to beat you." He grinned, friendly.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," said Sam. "Henri is my friend. I was wondering what had happened to him."

"Oh, he's all right. Look! There he comes now."

Sam looked up and saw that it was indeed Henri coming in. But he was not racing down the road in his usual manner. He was proceeding at a slow jog—little more than a walk. Ragtek was riding in the sled. Then Sam saw why Henri was not hurrying. Another of the dogs was limping severely. It

was Pirate, young son of the faithful old Napoleon.

Henri was smiling as usual, despite his ill fortune, and the crowd, with whom he was always a great favorite, cheered him loudly as he came down to the finish line. He only grinned at them, and as soon as he had crossed the line he hurried forward to his lame dog, while Mr. Spencer came forward to hold the sled for him. Sam edged through to his side.

"Hard luck, Henri," he said. "I'm sorry it happened."

"Vaire hard luck for Ragtek and Pirate," replied Henri, examining the bruised paws of the latter. "Now she have to be lef' behin', bot' of him. Vaire hard luck."

The Boy Scout guides started to show Henri to his stable, and Sam followed on with Mr. Spencer. To his pleasure, he found that they were heading for the same stable where his own team had been put up. Spunk ran to him when he came in, but he bade him lay down while he helped Henri unharness his dogs, and the big leader obeyed.

"This will be quite a handicap to you,

Henri," said Mr. Spencer, waving his hand at the two lame dogs.

"I'm keep going, m'sieu," Henri replied, "but I'm don' t'ink I'm win now. It is too bad. Those dog, she try hard, but the road, she is vaire rough some place, and his feet, they don' stan' it."

"I am glad you didn't try to push them along just the same after they became lame," said Mr. Spencer.

Henri looked up, surprised that such a thought should have entered his patron's head. "Henri don' drive lame dogs," he said.

"Of course not," agreed Mr. Spencer. "How did your dogs come through, Sam?"

"Great," said the boy. "All in good condition."

"I'm t'ink you have to win those race now," said Henri. "Me, I'm keep going, but I'm don' t'ink I'm win."

"I intend to win," said Sam, positively.

"You are tied for first place with Johnny Burns now, aren't you?" Mr. Spencer asked, looking at the boy speculatively.

"Yes, unless some one else has come in with better time since we left the finish line."

"They tell me this young Burns is a great little driver with a strong, fast team of dogs," Mr. Spencer continued.

"I think I can beat him," Sam insisted, stoutly.

"What do you want to win for?" Mr. Spencer questioned. "Do you expect to get any money out of it?"

"Certainly not. I just want Spunk to win—Spunk and Rich Man and Poor Man and the others. And they will win, too."

Mr. Spencer smiled. "Good," he said. "I just wanted to see if you had come to understand dogs as well as Henri said you had."

Sam felt self-conscious at this disclosure of the fact that Mr. Spencer was examining him, and his eyes fell. Spunk, who had been lying at his feet, rose, stretched his weary muscles, and stuck his nose into the boy's hand. Sam stroked him mechanically.

"You are very fond of Spunk, aren't you?" said Mr. Spencer.

Sam nodded. The fact was self-evident.

"You are fond of the rest of the team, too?"

Again Sam nodded. He did not resent

this cross-examination, as he would have done once, but he was embarrassed by it and puzzled.

The door was pushed open and one of the Boy Scout guides came back into the stable. "The teams are all in," he announced, looking at Sam, "and you and Johnny Burns are still tied for first place."

"You hear that, Spunk, old man?" cried Sam, hugging the dog around the neck. "You're winning, do you understand?"

Spunk wagged his tail, joyfully.

"Sam," said Mr. Spencer, casually, "are you quite sure you are going to win this race? There are two more days of it, you know."

"You bet I'm going to win," replied Sam, as Henri grinned at him.

"Do you think Jacques would sell the team?" Mr. Spencer continued.

Sam looked up, startled. "What? Why?"

"Well, if you win, I will buy the team and present it to you. That would be only fair to you and to the dogs."

Sam tried to speak, but his voice choked him.

CHAPTER XXI

LOSING GROUND

HENRI'S spirits rose as the night progressed. True he had only five dogs left in condition to race, and he was now down in sixth place, but even so he began to think he had a chance of pulling up. It was while he was rubbing down his favorite, the sturdy old Napoleon, that he began to take courage.

"Maybe I'm do something yet," he said, breaking a silence which had fallen in the stable as the men worked over the dogs. Sam, who was rubbing Garçon with liniment, and Mr. Spencer, who was mixing up eggs and porridge for the dogs, turned to the little Frenchman as he spoke.

"Are you going to beat Sam out of his team?" smiled Mr. Spencer.

Henri's smile faded, and his patron hastened to reassure him.

"If he beats everybody but you, the offer

will still hold," he said. "But how did you get the sudden burst of courage?"

"That Napoleon," Henri explained, "he jus' look up at me and say he is not lose yet. He is one fine dog, you bet."

They worked on, rubbing and rubbing, the strong liniment making the dogs wince a little at first with its heat, but then easing their muscles and making them pliable under the skillful hands of the men. It was long after supper time when they finally finished rubbing the dogs and had given them their rations and left them to sleep.

"Why not have a little liniment on your own muscles, Henri?" asked Mr. Spencer. "Sam here is young, and his muscles can stand the strain, but I should think yours might get a little stiff and tired after running the number of miles you do in the course of a day's racing."

Henri grinned. "Me, I'm not dead yet. My moosle she strong as anyt'ing. I'm try some of that liniment one tam'—ooch, she is too hot."

Laughing, they went to the inn for supper, leaving the dogs all snoring peacefully. And it was not long before Henri and Sam

followed the example of the dogs and sought slumber.

Morning, however, found them up some time before the time for starting, giving the dogs another rub-down before the day's trek. Sam was greatly excited as he hitched Spunk into the rigging, for to-day he was to drive the whole route. He was to have his real test as a racing driver. Furthermore, he was starting with odds in his favor, with only one other driver as well situated as he.

Spunk was as impatient to be off as a schoolboy starting on his vacation. The night's rest had completely restored his energy, and he danced around in the harness, shaking his head and looking at Sam with eager eyes for the signal to lead the team out. The other dogs, too, seemed keyed up to the racing pitch, and Sam had to keep talking to them in a quiet undertone to prevent them from starting before he was ready. Only old Lawyer stood quietly in his tracks, unexcited, taking everything as a matter of course and ready to do his share with dignity and solemnity, if not with excitement.

Henri drove out of the stable first, as he was to start in third place. Johnny Burns,

Sam's rival for the first day's honors, was starting second, and Sam was not starting until after five others had gone. That meant that he would be exactly a half hour behind the first team in starting, twenty-five minutes behind Johnny Burns and twenty minutes behind Henri.

He held the impatient Spunk around the shoulders as Henri drove out, laughing at the dog's excess of spirits.

"Save it, old man, save it," he cautioned. "We may need all the fire and ginger you can muster before this race is over."

Finally he drove out and up behind the starting line, waiting for his turn to go. The crowd buzzed as he appeared, telling one another over again about the happenings of the day before, and the more bold of the spectators crowded around the team when he stopped, staring at the dogs and at the boy who had taken them in hand when their driver was injured. Spunk and his teammates resumed their impatient dancing, and most of the curious ones fell back, out of range.

Sam gave little heed to the onlookers, having his hands full with the impatient team.

He stood at his place behind the sled, holding down the brake and waiting for his name to be called out.

"Sam Briggs, driving for Jacques Thebault, starting in one minute," called the announcer.

Sam released his brake with a word to Spunk, and the lead dog swung from the side of the road into the middle. But just as he did so, a small boy, who had been edging closer and closer to Garçon, in the wheel position, took a final step forward to pat the dog. The sudden movement of the team scooped him up like a bag of feathers and he flew about three feet into the air. Sam shouted in alarm, and clamped his brake down again, just as the boy landed, with a ponderous thud, in the very center of the sled. There he sat, bewildered, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. Meanwhile the starter had given the signal for Sam to start, and officials were running towards him from all directions.

"Throw that kid out and get going," called one of the officials.

"You're officially started; you're losing time," yelled another.

Then the little boy decided to laugh, and Sam, relieved, grinned back at him as some one lifted him from the sled. He again released his brake, shouted to Spunk, and was off. The crowd cheered as he drove through the double lane of human beings.

"Not much like Jacques Thebault, is he?" Sam heard somebody remark as he passed. The remark pleased him, and at the same time reminded him that if he won this race the dogs need never suffer bad treatment from Jacques again.

"Hi-yi, Spunk, mush on!" he yelled.

Spunk needed no urging, and neither did his associates. They were out to race, and race they did. Like unloosed tigers, they tore over the road, seemingly tireless. Even old Lawyer began to show faint traces of excitement, as though his stolidity were not strong enough to withstand the contagion. It was a hard course over which they were running, too, with many long, steep hills and rough, icy roads. Yet they raced on.

They were scarcely more than a mile out when they overtook Wallace Bronson, who had started just ahead of Sam. He tried to keep ahead for a few minutes, but seeing the

powerful strides by which Sam's dogs were advancing on him, he drew out of the road and signalled for him to pass.

"Lots of pep in your team this morning," he yelled, as Sam drove by.

"Plenty," Sam agreed, and hustled on.

A few minutes later his hurrying dogs brought him upon three teams bunched together. One was Henri's team and the others were the first and fourth starters. Only Johnny Burns remained far enough ahead to be out of sight. Henri was setting the pace for the three teams ahead of him, and Sam fell in the rear for a few minutes. His dogs, however, were anxious to pass, and presently, when a hill slowed down the teams ahead of him, Sam took to the side of the road while Spunk led his team-mates at a gallop by all three teams.

Henri waved cheerfully, though Sam thought he could read a note of worry in his friend's face.

"How are your dogs standing up?" he asked, over his shoulder.

"I'm guess she's all right," said Henri, uncertainly.

"Burns far ahead?" Sam asked.

"Oui, that Burns she go vaire fast to-day," Henri replied. "You have to hurry vaire much to beat him."

"Then I'm off," shouted Sam. "Mush on, Spunk."

He soon left Henri and the other two teams out of sight behind him, and was again rushing over hills and across level stretches. The dogs were in such form that Sam could only keep up with them by riding on the runners a large part of the time, although he ran as much as possible to keep from tiring them or retarding their speed. Around every corner he expected to see his rival, and whenever he came to a long stretch of straight road he strained his eyes to see the young Manitoban in the distance, but always he was disappointed.

Coming to a crossroads where there was a group of people waiting to see the teams pass, Sam asked them, in passing, how long ago the first team had passed.

"Must of be'n half 'n hour ago," was the unwelcome reply. "He sure was travelin' some, too."

Sam urged his team on the harder after that, until it seemed as though he must over-

take his rival soon. But he did not. Instead, when he passed through the first village, he was again told that Burns was about half an hour ahead of him. He pressed on, giving all his attention to keeping the dogs keyed up to their early pitch of excitement and enthusiasm. Spunk relieved him of the duty of guiding the team, except in a perfunctory way, by turning at every corner where a red flag indicated the course. Sam found time to marvel at the dog's intelligence, even while his mind was busy with thoughts of overtaking the team ahead.

More hills, more hamlets, more level stretches, more snow drifts, more rough ice hummocks—on they went, with Burns always somewhere out of sight ahead.

"Hi-yi, hi-yi! Mush on, Spunk! Get along, Garçon! Show some fight, Lawyer! Up, Doctor! Hi-yi, hi-yi!"

The dogs hurried on. Sam thought they must be gaining on Burns. But when they passed through the next village he was told that Burns was thirty-five minutes ahead of him. Phenomenal time, that youth from Manitoba must be making. Sam gritted his teeth.

"Spunk, old man, we must win this race," he pleaded.

The dogs hurried on, but the race was telling on them. The hills were getting to be harder to scramble over. Muscles were aching. Wind was shorter. Yet when Sam called out to them, they put forth all their strength again. On they went, nearer and nearer the finish of the day's course. But Burns was still out of sight—still increasing his lead, perhaps.

When Sam had finally driven across the finish line, the men who crowded around him hastened to confirm his worst fears. Burns, they told him, had indeed done the day's lap in phenomenal time. He had finished forty-eight minutes ahead of Sam, which gave him a lead in corrected time of twenty-three minutes for the day. And since they had been tied yesterday, the same twenty-three-minute lead held for the entire race thus far. His only chance to win now was to overcome the handicap the next day, and to do that he would have to repeat Burns' phenomenal feat, while the latter would have to drop back to a normal speed. It looked like a gloomy prospect. Even

now, indeed, one or more of the teams that started behind him to-day might come in early enough to bring their corrected time for the day lower than his—low enough, perhaps, to displace him from second place.

He took his dogs to the stable disconsolately. Then, as on the day previous, he returned to wait for Henri's arrival. This time he had an even longer wait than before, for several other teams came in ahead of Henri. When the little Frenchman did arrive he had another of his dogs on the sled, riding. Yet he came in with a smile. Sam wondered how he could do it, and marveled at him.

"More hard luck, Henri?" Sam asked. He noticed that it was the powerful Moose that was riding.

"Oui," said Henri. "Poor ol' Moose, he go lame, too."

"You seem cheerful about it."

"Oui. Why not? It is the race. My dog, she do the bes' she can. I'm do the bes' I can. W'at would you?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"What would I? I would win or be unhappy about it," said Sam.

"Ah, my frien', but you are young. To win, it is not all."

"You certainly are a real sportsman," declared Sam.

"I try to be as good as my dog, maybe," said Henri. "They don' t'ink of win. They t'ink of do their bes'. It is good."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," Sam said.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HOME STRETCH

ALREADY Johnny Burns was being hailed as the winner. The other drivers were calculating their chances of getting second place away from Sam, or of finishing third or fourth. Burns was considered unbeatable, what with the proved fleetness of his team and the big lead he had already won. The wise ones wagged their heads and told one another that only a miracle could beat the Western lad now. Yet there were some who courted argument by falling back on the old slogan, "Anything may happen."

Johnny Burns, himself, was as sure of his ultimate victory as any of the prognosticators. His fringed leather jacket sat jauntily on his spare shoulders as he strolled here and there about the village where the second day's trek had ended, accepting without question the homage which he considered his

due. Meeting Sam as the latter walked towards the stable which he was sharing with Henri, Johnny greeted him patronizingly and complimented him on his day's trek in a way that implied that his own trek, of course, was quite beyond ordinary praise.

But Sam was far from admitting defeat. There was another day coming, and he meant to make the most of it. More, he meant to wrest the victory right out of the grasp of this confident young man. Twenty-three minutes might be a big handicap, but the stakes also were big. He was out to win a dog team—to save Spunk and these other four-legged pals of his from lives of slavery to a despicable master. They would exert themselves to the utmost—he knew that. They would do their best, as Henri said, and so would he. And if they failed to win—. But they would win. They must win.

Again that night Sam and Henri spent the late afternoon and early evening hours working over their dogs. Mr. Spencer helped, too, so that when the dogs were finally left to sleep they were once more relieved of the cramps and stiffness of muscle

which are the natural legacy of strenuous exertion. They slept like babies, and Sam was heartened as he left them.

Sam wondered how Henri retained his cheerfulness. He had been forced to leave two of his dogs to be shipped home from the last village. He would have to leave another here, and perhaps two, as another of his young dogs was showing signs of utter fatigue after the two days of hard pulling. Yet Henri went about preparing for the last lap as happily as though he had been having the best luck in the world. He worked patiently over his remaining dogs, and then helped Sam work over his.

"Henri, you are so cheerful you almost give me the creeps," said Sam. "Why don't you get mad and rave a little about your bad luck."

Henri shrugged. "Me, I'm get mad when somebody do somet'ing to me. Why I should get mad when my dog work so hard she get lame or tired out? Beside, my frien', if you win, it is enough for Henri."

Sam went to bed early, determined to be fit for the battle in the morning. And he arose early, giving his dogs another rub-

down to limber up their muscles for the final and decisive lap of the race.

But Johnny Burns, confident of victory and confident of his own strength as well as of the strength and speed of his dogs, felt the need of no such precautions. There had been a big dance in the town hall that night in honor of the race, and Johnny had been the lion of the party. Feted and congratulated, he had been having the time of his life, and it was well after midnight before he had sought rest. It was his proud boast that he could drive a dog team all day and dance all night without being fatigued in the least by the excess of activity. Friendly officials had urged him to leave the dance and go to bed, but he had laughed at them. They had warned him that the last lap was the longest and in many ways the hardest, but he had assured them of his fitness.

And when he appeared for the start in the morning, he seemed to justify his boasts. There seemed to be springs in his toes as he swung his lank, spare body along behind his team. There was no heaviness in his eyes, but only an anticipatory sparkle, as though the race were already finished and he ac-

claimed the victor. Indeed, the cheers that went up from the sidelines as he received the starting signal were very much like acclamations of victory.

Sam, squatting Indian-fashion beside Spunk as he waited for his turn to start, heard the cheers, and they were like a challenge to him.

"Hear that, Spunk?" he said in an undertone. "You and I will get those cheers tonight."

Burns was starting first this morning, and Sam second. It meant that they would fight it out for the lead in the first few miles, and then, if Sam succeeded in passing his rival, he would have to open a wide gap between them to overcome the handicap of the twenty-three-minute lead which was now held by Burns.

Both Sam and Burns had their full teams still in harness. Most of the other drivers had been compelled to leave one or two dogs behind, although none had been as hard hit as Henri. It remained for the two young drivers to fight it out for the supremacy, with the older drivers working for the minor prizes.

Sam's dogs were as full of vim and impatience as on the day before. Spunk led them with head erect, setting a smart pace. From the moment the starter's pistol gave them the signal to be off, the seven eager dogs were straining every muscle to move forward with all speed. It was to be a long trek—a fraction over fifty miles—but neither dogs nor driver thought of conserving energy. It was too late for that. This race could only be won by taking advantage of every minute, packing into it all the distance that strength of boy and dogs would permit.

The first few miles of the race was a repetition of the heartbreaking effort of the day before. On and on they went, putting forth every ounce of energy. Endless roads, covered with snow; hills, drifts, windblown stretches—all appeared before them, passed under their flying feet, and disappeared behind them. And always Johnny Burns and his team was somewhere ahead. Only five minutes start had the young Westerner had this morning, but he held it—perhaps he was increasing it.

"Hi-yi! hi-yi!" cried Sam, tossing hand-

fuls of soft snow at his straining team. "Mush on—on."

Up the hills they flew at a trot, Sam running behind, panting and shouting. On the down grades he hopped on the runners, regaining his breath, and then when a level stretch opened before them he was off again, running up beside the dogs, ahead of them, back to his place at the steering bars, urging them on, keeping them excited—and keeping himself equally excited. On and on! Johnny Burns must be just around that next bend.

More than an hour of this. The thing was getting hopeless. Sam visioned Jacques taking the dogs back across the ten-mile woods after he had recovered from his injuries—back to bondage and beatings. Spunk, too? No, no, he would find some way to keep his faithful old friend away from that man. But how?

"Hi-yi, Spunk! Mush on!"

Spunk was barking eagerly as he led the team on the gallop over the snow-covered roads. This was his life. He needed no urging from the boy, though he liked to hear his voice. He growled a warning at Rich

Man, more to keep him keyed up than anything else, for he knew that the aristocrat, like all the others, was putting his whole body and soul into the race. Up this hill on the run, now! On and on!

They slid over the top of the long hill, and Sam hopped on the runners to catch his breath as they slid down the other side. He glanced ahead at the road. It went down and then up again—another long hill ahead. But what—?

"There he is, Spunk; There he is!" he cried out. "Mush on! We'll beat him yet!"

Johnny Burns was just going over the top of the next hill. But his team was proceeding at a walk. The pace was beginning to tell on the lad who had danced half the night, and he was riding up over the hill on the runners. For nearly ten miles he had equalled Sam's best efforts, but now he was weakening. His dogs, too, not having received the long and painstaking attention that Sam and Henri had accorded theirs, were feeling the effects of their strenuous activity.

The very sight of Johnny Burns and his team gave Sam new courage, and as he

reasoned out the probable meaning of Johnny's slow progress over the hill, he grew even more heartened. His "hi-yi's" took on a sharp crescendo. His feet barely touched the ground as he bounced along, now ahead of his team, now beside it, now behind it. The ring in his voice was communicated to Spunk, who barked with renewed enthusiasm, and who lengthened his gallop until the sled was sliding along like a power boat.

Down the hill and up again they went, gaining rapidly on the team ahead. Johnny Burns looked back, then urged his dogs on faster. For a few minutes he held his lead, fired, like Sam, to a new burst of energy by the sight of his rival. But presently he was on another hill, and it was too much for him. He ran a little way, then hopped on the runners. His dogs slowed down to a walk. He hopped off and started them trotting, but soon hopped back on again and the trot again became a walk.

Spunk led his team-mates up over the hill without a falter in their brisk trot, Sam jogging behind. The young Westerner made one more ineffectual attempt to keep ahead, but Spunk already was barking at his very

heels. Reluctantly he drew over to the side of the road. Spunk led his team past, barking joyously. Sam guided the sled back into the middle of the road. They topped the crest of the hill, with Johnny Burns and his team behind them.

"Now then, Spunk!" yelled Sam. "Mush on!"

The race was yet to be won. In passing Johnny Burns, Sam had only taken five minutes off the twenty-three minutes lead held by the favorite. He would have to gain faster than that to overcome the handicap. His only hope was that his team would be able to keep up the pace set thus far, and that Burns would be obliged to slow down, having spent his energy at the beginning of the race.

It was another half hour before he could shake Burns from his heels. The Westerner's dogs were using his team as a pacemaker, relieving Burns of most of the work of urging them on. But the pace set by Spunk was fast—too fast for Burns' tired dogs to keep up indefinitely—and finally Sam began to see with satisfaction the gap widening between the two teams. Soon

Burns had been left around a bend in the road.

On and on, without any let-up. Sam marveled at the endurance of his dogs. Of course they were tired. When he stopped once to adjust the harness, they immediately laid down in the snow to rest until he should urge them on again. But there was no slackening of the pace, no shirking in the harness—only the steady pull forward at the fast pace set by Spunk.

Sam even wondered at his own endurance. He had run about half of the race himself at a clip that would have done credit to a marathoner. Yet he felt no desire to let up. He had not time to think of aching muscles. Probably that was the way the dogs felt.

On they went, through long wooded roads, through villages and hamlets where great crowds floated past and behind them in rapid panorama; by farmhouses where family groups waved at them and shouted greetings. The landscape was getting more familiar now, as they approached the home stretch. The race was to end in that same little village square where a year ago Sam had shunned the crowd. They would soon

be passing the cabin, going down over the ridge into the village. Sam made a mental note to remind him that he must run ahead of the dogs when they reached the cabin to prevent them from turning in. He hoped they would have a right to turn in there afterwards, though. That would depend on how far back Johnny Burns was.

There it was—the cabin—home! Sam ran ahead of the team, and guided Spunk by. It dulled the enthusiasm of the dogs for a few minutes, but soon they were galloping down the ridge, with Sam riding.

Into the village street! There was the crowd waiting in the square. They would be surprised to see the Hermit's son coming in first, when they were expecting Johnny Burns. The news would have preceded them that Johnny was due to win. Well, maybe he would, but he would know he had been in a race; there was some satisfaction in that. He and Spunk and Garçon and all the rest had certainly done their best—. Why, that was Henri's expression! He smiled at the thought.

"Hurray! Hurray! It's Sam Briggs! The Hermit's son! Hurray!"

The crowd was cheering him. A year ago they had jeered him. Funny world.

Across the finish line!

He wondered if he had won.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RACE ENDS

IF Johnny Burns should come in within eighteen minutes after Sam, his total time for the race would still be less than Sam's, and he would be the winner. That was all Sam could think about as the crowd closed in on him, all anxious to congratulate him on the day's trek. To-day it was he who had made the phenomenal time. At least, that was the way the crowd put it; he knew that it was Spunk and the other dogs to whom the credit belonged. It remained to be seen now whether that phenomenal time would make him the victor.

Everybody was trying to talk to him at once, when all he wanted to find out was what the last report had been from Johnny Burns. Finally, in the babble of voices, he was able to make his question understood, and to learn in reply that Johnny had been fifteen minutes behind him in the last village.

Fifteen minutes! If he kept that up, he would still win the race.

He tried to get clear of the crowd, but he had become a local hero—he, the Hermit's son—and everybody wanted to show everybody else how familiar he was with the celebrity. Some newspaper photographers managed to push the crowd back long enough to snap some pictures of him with the dogs, and then the crowd swarmed in on him again. Sam felt some of his old dislike for the mass of humanity coming back upon him. If they would only leave him alone until this horrible suspense was over—until he knew whether he had won or not, whether the dogs were to be saved from Jacques or not. But of course these people did not know the stakes.

He decided to drive his team over to Henri's stable to leave them until the results were known. That would help use up these long minutes of waiting for Johnny Burns, and would get him away from this crowd of people. He started to drive away.

"Sammee!"

He looked around, surprised to hear himself so familiarly addressed in a feminine

voice. His puzzled scowl changed to a smile when he recognized Mrs. Thebault. She was pushing through the crowd toward him, a smile of welcome barely masking the sad wistfulness of her face.

"Mon ami," she said.

She trudged along beside him while he took the dogs to the stable, helped him unharness them and make them comfortable, and then returned to the square with him. They attempted no conversation, but Sam knew that she was mutely thanking him for finishing out the race for Jacques. If he won, she would have the money to take care of her injured husband; otherwise she would have to pay his bills with her own petty earnings.

The minutes had been ticking by. Sam had been in fifteen minutes, and still Johnny Burns was not in sight. Sixteen minutes. Seventeen minutes. One minute to go. Sam's heart beat wildly.

"There he comes!"

Instantly the crowd was in an uproar. Johnny Burns had appeared around the bend up the road. He was driving his team at a gallop. He knew that this was a close

race, but he did not know how close. He did not know that he had less than a minute in which to get down the road and across the finish line. Yet he came as fast as he could.

Sam held his breath as the Manitoban drew nearer the finish line. He looked around nervously, and his eyes lit on the timekeeper, holding his stopwatch poised in his hand. Nearer, nearer. The seconds were ticking by. Sam could hear the crisp snow crackling under Johnny Burns' moccasined feet. He could hear the breathing of the dogs. Mrs. Thebault gripped his arm. He stared at the timekeeper, whose face was a perfect mask, telling him nothing. The crowd was tense, silent, understanding that this race would be won by seconds—a rare thing in a dog race.

Every one in the crowd seemed to take a deep breath as Johnny Burns trotted across the finish line. It was as though a breeze had arisen in a quiet forest.

The timekeeper snapped his watch, held it before his face a moment, and turned to the judges.

"Briggs wins," he said.

Sam felt as if the earth had turned to clouds under his feet. Spunk was his! The whole team was his! Jacques could never abuse them any more! Dreams were coming true!

The wistful little woman beside him seemed equally happy. She did not know that Mr. Spencer was going to pour more money into her family treasury by buying the dogs, but she did know that Sam had saved her husband's little wealth, and that she could now see that he received proper treatment; not that she held any love for him in her heart, for he had killed all that long ago, but she was still his wife, and that, to her, was a sacred obligation.

Knowing that it would be some time before Henri would get in, as he had started out with only three dogs this morning, Sam turned back to the stable to give his dogs their rub-down. Mrs. Thebault again went with him, and soon demonstrated her ability as a dog trainer.

Only Spunk rose to greet them when they came in the stable, the other dogs opening tired eyes to look and then closing them again. But Spunk caught the jubilance in

Sam's mood, and leaped up on him, just as he used to do when the two of them lived alone up there on the ridge. Sam threw his arm around the dog's shoulders, and scratched the big head affectionately. Mrs. Thebault petted him, too, talking to him in French. Garçon arose at the sound of her voice and joined the group, seeking his share of the praise that he heard being bestowed.

Together, Sam and Mrs. Thebault rubbed the dogs, fed them, and left them to sleep. Mr. Spencer met them as they were returning to the finish line.

"Henri has had some more bad luck," he said. "A snowmobile just came in with his other young dog on it, all fagged out. That leaves him with just Napoleon and Biff. He will be very late getting in."

"Henri?" repeated Mrs. Thebault, understanding only the name of her old friend.

Mr. Spencer told her in French of Henri's misfortunes in the race. They walked on, and Mr. Spencer laid his hand on Sam's shoulder.

"That was a splendid victory," he said, simply.

Sam made no reply, except by smiling happily, and Mr. Spencer resumed his conversation in French with Mrs. Thebault.

A group of newspaper reporters joined them presently, and began to ply Sam with questions. How old was he? Had he always lived in East Bryantsville? How long had he been driving a dog team? What was his lead dog's name? These and many more questions they asked him, as one by one the other teams came in. And when the reporters left him, others crowded around again. Johnny Burns came over and shook his hand. The chief judge congratulated him. Judge Baldwin pompously patted him on the back. Even Horace Simpson, the grizzled old constable who had twice taken him to jail, came forward with a friendly grin.

Sam seemed to see the crowd in a different light now. These people had not meant to be cruel and malicious a year ago—these same people. They had really thought he did the thing of which he was accused. Now they had forgotten all that, and he was a victor, a hero. It was all rather silly, when you came to think about it—the way they

shifted from one extreme to the other. But, for that matter, he supposed he had changed some himself. Perhaps that had something to do with it.

He was still waiting for Henri to come in, and he looked around for Mr. Spencer and Mrs. Thebault. The crowd was dwindling. He saw Mrs. Thebault watching him from the doorway of a store. Mr. Spencer was not in sight. He turned and walked toward the store.

A ripple went through the remnant of the crowd. Sam turned and looked up the road. Yes, it was Henri—but he was driving just one dog, Napoleon. The little crowd, seeing this display of sportsmanship, began to cheer while he was still far up the street. Sam could see Biff lying in the sled. Henri was smiling, just as though he were winning the race with a full team of seven dogs. Happy Henri!

There was a flash of fire, a sharp report, and Napoleon rolled over on the snow. The sled, with Henri holding it, bumped into the dog's body and stopped. Henri's face turned pallid, and he dropped to his knees beside his dead favorite.

The crowd, startled, stood motionless for a full half minute, a short, sharp intake of breath on all sides giving the impression of a mighty sigh. Then, with one movement and one cry, the crowd advanced as the scantily clad figure of a man appeared, like an apparition, from behind a snowbank a few feet from Henri. The figure wobbled uncertainly, waving an unsteady revolver towards Henri. The driver was about to follow his dog into eternity—sent by an assassin's bullet.

A shrill, feminine shriek rose above the sound of another sharp sigh from the stunned crowd. "Jacques!"

Sam leaped forward as the cry, uttered by Mrs. Thebault, rang in his ears. Yes, it was Jacques! He must stop him. But he never could reach him before the fatal bullet would be flying at Henri.

Jacques poised for just a second to shoot. Then, in that second, a shudder passed over his frame. The revolver hung limply in his hand, fell to the ground. Jacques crumpled and fell unconscious into the bank of snow.

The crowd again moved forward. Sam was well ahead of the others now, and he

could hear Mrs. Thebault running behind him. He bent over the prostrate form of Jacques. Blood was jetting from the man's injured foot, staining the snow where he lay. The passion of his long-nursed rage against Henri evidently had entirely possessed him as he lay on his bed in the little village hospital, and he had given way to it, weakened and crazed as he was by pain and loss of blood. He had pulled on a few clothes, had obtained the revolver somewhere, and had dragged himself out to lie in wait for his prey. But his own unhealed wounds had overcome him just as he was about to claim complete revenge for all his fancied grievances.

Mrs. Thebault was on her knees beside him now, and Henri was looking down on the unconscious man. The crowd had pushed around in a close circle, and some members of it were mumbling dire threats against Jacques. Horace Simpson pushed through the crowd, ordering the others to stand back, and taking charge of the situation. He picked out a squad of men to help him, and they lifted Jacques up on an impromptu stretcher, which had been a win-

dow blind on a nearby house, and carried him back to the hospital. Mrs. Thebault followed, sobbing and uttering broken little sentences in French. Her face was horror-struck, and she seemed crushed by the realization of what had happened.

As the crowd dispersed, Henri went back to his dead lead dog. Somebody had cut the harness and hauled the sled away, with Biff in it. Henri stood looking at Napoleon. There was no happiness about him now. Sam rested a hand on his friend's shoulder, realizing the inadequacy of words. To some men the killing of a dog might be a small matter. To Henri it ranked among the major crimes. And Napoleon was his best loved dog.

Sam's mind ran back to Henri's eager preparations for the race. How carefully and patiently he had trained the three young dogs! What pains he had taken to put the older ones in condition! Then, as the race went on, his dogs had worn out, one by one. Still he had kept on, like the game sportsman that he was, until he was finishing with just his one old favorite. Cheerfully, too, he had come in, proud of the staunch old Na-

poleon, belittling his own gameness. And then this tragic ending!

Sam stepped forward and picked the dead dog up in his strong arms. The story that Henri had told him flashed across his mind —the story of that other favorite that had met a similar fate at the hands of the same assassin. Poor Happy Henri!

He walked slowly down the street, bearing his burden. Henri followed.

CHAPTER XXIV

REWARDS

THEY buried Napoleon on a quiet hillside, with a ceremony of silence. When they returned to the stable, they found Mr. Spencer waiting for them, having just heard of the tragic ending which had marked Henri's race. He, too, commiserated with Henri in silence, feeling the uselessness of words. Finally Henri, himself, broke the sombre silence.

"I'm t'ink I'm don' race some more, M'sieu Spencer."

"Nonsense, Henri," said Mr. Spencer, though his voice was kindly. "Of course you will. I have some plans."

"I'm t'ink I'm go back home, back to Quebec."

Mr. Spencer laid one hand on Henri's shoulder, the other on Sam's. "Please don't think any more about it just now," he said. "I want you both to get ready for the banquet now."

The banquet of which he spoke was the annual aftermath of the big race. All the drivers, trainers, and officials attended, as well as the men who had sponsored the race. The prizes always were awarded at this function, and tales of the race were recounted.

"I'm don' t'ink I'm go," said Henri. "I'm stay here wit' the dogs." He waved his hand to point out Sam's sleeping team and the two dogs of his own team that had returned, also sleeping.

"Henri," argued Mr. Spencer, "Sam must go to the banquet to accept the prize money. Surely you want to be there to see him do it."

"Mrs. Thebault—Marie—will need the money, Henri," Sam added. "Please come."

Henri forced a faint smile to his face. "I'm go," he said.

At the opera house, where the banquet—the first Sam had ever attended—was to be held, Sam was greeted cordially by the men with whom he had been competing. He found himself liking all of them, because he learned, as he talked to them, that they responded to much the same emotions that he

did. Dogs were the main subject of conversation, for dogs were the chief interest of these men. They were all much like Henri, Sam thought, judging men by their attitude toward dogs. Rough men, they were, yet the way they tried to speak comfortingly to Henri would have done credit to tender-hearted school girls, Sam thought. A year ago he would not have believed that such men existed.

The tables were being spread, and the men were sitting around the hall, waiting for the dinner to begin. Mr. Spencer, after coming in with Henri and Sam, had gone out again, explaining that he wanted to arrange right away with Mrs. Thebault about the purchase of Spunk and his team-mates. Henri, catching some of Sam's happiness at the approaching culmination of his dreams, began to brighten up, his old smile creeping back to displace the look of grief on his face.

They had just sat down at the table, leaving a place between Sam and Henri for Mr. Spencer, when the latter returned. Sam looked at him eagerly, to see if his expression bespoke success in his mission, but Mr.

Spencer was not smiling. Watching him walk soberly forward, Sam knew that something had happened.

Mr. Spencer came up and called Henri to one side, talking to him in a low voice. Henri appeared shocked, and without a word he turned and went out of the hall. Mr. Spencer sat down quietly beside Sam. The boy looked at him inquiringly, but said nothing.

"Jacques," whispered Mr. Spencer

"He is—dead?"

"Yes."

"Where is Henri going?"

"To Marie. She needs him."

Sam started to push back his chair. "I'll go, too."

"Wait," said Mr. Spencer, staying him with his hand. "She will need the prize money all the more now. You must stay and take it to her."

Sam pulled his chair back up to the table. The men around him were eating. He dabbled with the food in his plate. The dinner seemed interminable. Finally it ended. There were speeches, but he did not hear what was said. Then Mr. Spencer was in-

troduced. He would tell them. Sam listened.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am sorry to bring you sad news. Jacques Thebault is dead."

A low buzz went around the table, and he continued: "It is not well to speak ill of the dead, but perhaps it is only just to say that he brought death on himself. Had he remained in his bed he undoubtedly would have recovered. Let us be charitable and suppose that his injuries unbalanced his mind and caused him to do the thing he did.

"He was an unfortunate man, disliked because he disliked others. He understood neither men nor dogs. He died, as you all know, because he tried to wreak vengeance for wrongs which he fancied he had suffered at the hands of a man who was his direct opposite, Henri Rousseau—Happy Henri, who is loved because he loves others.

"You all saw what Henri did in this race. Had he won a thousand races he could not have earned greater respect or merited more praise. Now he thinks he wants to go back home, to retire. I know you would all be sorry to see him do that. Every man who

is interested in sled-dog racing would be sorry to see it lose such a man as Henri. And I doubt if he would long be happy without dogs. So I have evolved a plan. I have recently bought some property near Henri's old home. It is my ambition to use that property as a ranch where perfect sled dogs will be bred. If Henri will undertake it for me—I have not yet spoken to him about it—I shall endeavor to fulfill that ambition.

"I had hoped to have two dogs as a nucleus for that ranch. One was Napoleon, who is dead. The other—" The speaker turned and placed his hand on the shoulder of the boy beside him. "The other was Sam Briggs' Spunk.

"There is a dog, gentlemen, that I consider the ideal sled dog. More than that, he is the ideal friend. A year ago he came into the life of my young friend here. I have watched that companionship with more interest than Sam knows. It has been a most valuable companionship to them both, but more particularly, perhaps, to Sam.

"I told Sam that if he won this race I would buy Jacques' team for him, Spunk

included. I have done so, but now I am going to ask him to do a difficult thing—to give up this beautiful companionship, to relinquish his claim on the team. I am going to ask him to do this partly because I want Henri to take those dogs to Quebec, but more because I want to take Sam to Boston with me.

"I make this proposition to him in the presence of you gentlemen because I want him to realize all that he is giving up—more than a fine, healthy, vigorous sport; truly, a complete and happy life, the life of the master of dogs. He has already been successful in that life, and now I would take him into a wider life and make him a master of men. Spunk has built the groundwork of his education. I ask him to let me build on it. I have no son. He has no father. I would like him to be the friend to me that he has been to Spunk. He does not have to accept. I have already bought Spunk and the other dogs, and I give them to him freely, gladly. If he chooses he may keep them here. But I would like him to go to college, then to help me bear the burdens of business as I grow older. I leave it to him to decide. I

trust him to decide rightly, as he, many times, has trusted Spunk."

The hall rang with cheers as Mr. Spencer sat down, and cries of "Speech! Speech!" flew at Sam from all sides. He felt himself pulled to his feet, but his mind was so confused that he hardly knew what was happening. Mr. Spencer saw his confusion and rose again, signalling for silence.

"This has been quite a jolt to the boy, coming so suddenly," he said. "If you gentlemen don't mind, he and I will take a little walk in the air and talk it over."

Outside, Mr. Spencer said: "You take a little walk by yourself, Sam, and think about all this. I will explain to the boys inside that you have gone home. Come to me in the morning."

Automatically Sam made his way to Henri's stable. Spunk would be there, and he could think better with Spunk at his side. He lit a lantern in the stable, and sat down by the sleeping dog, his head in his hands. He had been sitting thus for perhaps an hour when Henri came in, surprised to find him there. He told Henri all Mr. Spencer had said.

"He is one good man," said Henri. "You will do it?"

"I don't know," said Sam, and both were silent.

Sam tried to visualize the future, but his mind insisted on delving into the past instead. His father would have warned him against accepting this proposition. It meant putting himself under deep and lasting obligations to a man. Was there any trickery in it? He dismissed the thought. No, something, something, had soured his father on mankind and he had accepted his father's estimates, but Spunk had led him away from all that. The Hermit's son was no more. He, Sam Briggs, could not doubt the sincerity of this man who had already showed himself a true friend on more than one occasion.

But giving up Spunk, giving up all his dreams of happiness up there on the ridge with his dogs, giving up the triumphs that he felt sure he could win in future races with Spunk to lead his team on to victories—that was another thing. If he was changed from the Hermit's son, he owed it all to Spunk. His moments of greatest happiness had been

moments spent in the companionship of the dog. Of course Henri would be a good master to him—but they would be somewhere up in Quebec while he would be in Boston or away to college.

College! He had long dreamed of that, too. But it had been mostly before his mind had been taken up with Spunk. Oh! it was a hard problem.

Henri had been sitting quietly in a corner. Sam suddenly remembered that he was there.

"What about yourself, Henri?" he asked. "Will you take charge of the ranch for him?"

For a moment Henri did not reply, but sat there framing his thoughts in words. Then he said: "My frien', you remember one day I tol' you why those dog they res' content? Look at him now." He pointed to the soundly sleeping dogs lying around about them.

"You see, my frien', they have done their bes' again. You and me, we mus' do our bes' too if we would res' content. You remember how you mak' yourself the fren' to Spunk when he need one frien'. So M'sieu Spencer he mak' himself the frien' to you and me. You ask Spunk to do one t'ing and

he do it. Then he res' content. M'sieu Spencer he ask you and me to do one t'ing. Me, I'm do w'at he ask. I'm t'ink you will, too."

Sam knelt down beside Spunk. The big dog's breath was coming and going in the deep, even manner of the peacefully sleeping.

"Take good care of him, Henri," said Sam.

Happy Henri smiled with the tenderness of a mother.

CHAPTER XXV

CONTENT

"YOUR mail, Mr. Briggs," said the secretary.

"Thank you, Miss Marshall. Just lay it down there on the desk, please," said the young man, turning from the window where he had been watching the snow settle over the rooftops of the adjoining buildings. He resumed his gazing as the secretary went out.

The new junior partner of the old Boston firm of Spencer, Spencer and Bruce was not particularly interested in reading his mail this morning. The first snow of the winter was falling, and, as usual, it had brought a flood of memories with it. As he stood there at his window watching it fall, he was recalling the day, ten years ago, when he had trotted across the finish line behind his dog team, the winner. A reminiscent smile played about his lips.

What a queer lad he had been! He remembered the brilliant toque, the gay trous-

ers, and all the rest of his bright-colored outfit. Well, of course this necktie that he was wearing now was not exactly subdued. That fondness for bright colors was perhaps the one relic of his old life, the pre-Spunk life. But he had not outlived the things Spunk had brought into his life. Instead they had grown on him—his love for dogs and for racing, his ability to choose the right kind of human friends, and to trust them after he had chosen them. This last was the thing on which his later life had been built. And he was considered successful.

Again his mind flitted back over the years, and he remembered the gladness with which he had learned that Henri, driving a team led by Spunk, had won the international dog derby at Quebec just a few weeks after he himself had won the New England race. Henri, who had thought that he could give up racing, had been unable to resist the call.

He remembered, too, the day he had sat in the little church up in Henri's old Quebec town, while the parish priest—the good Father of Henri's story—had made Henri and Marie man and wife. And he remembered the many happy visits he had made to

the ranch where Henri and Marie lived with their children and their dogs. Good old Spunk was always glad to see him—good old Spunk who had always lived up to the best ideals of dogdom.

With a reminiscent sigh the young man turned to his desk. This winter weather, how it got into his blood! As he picked up his mail he resolved to get away for a few days soon and run up to Quebec for another visit with Henri and Marie and Spunk.

Mechanically his fingers sorted out the letters. Then he stopped, as he recognized the sprawling handwriting on one of the envelopes. He opened the letter. He read:

"Dear Sam, Your good old Spunk he die last night. I know how bad it make you feel, because I love him the same as you and so does Marie. But my friend you know he was always one good dog and now you know he res' content. Marie and I we bury him in the quiet grove. You will see the marker when you come again. It just say like this:

"SPUNK,

"Leader of the Dog Team

"He Rests Content."

Samuel Briggs, once known as the Hermit's son, repeated the epitaph softly to himself: "Spunk, leader of the dog team; he rests content."

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